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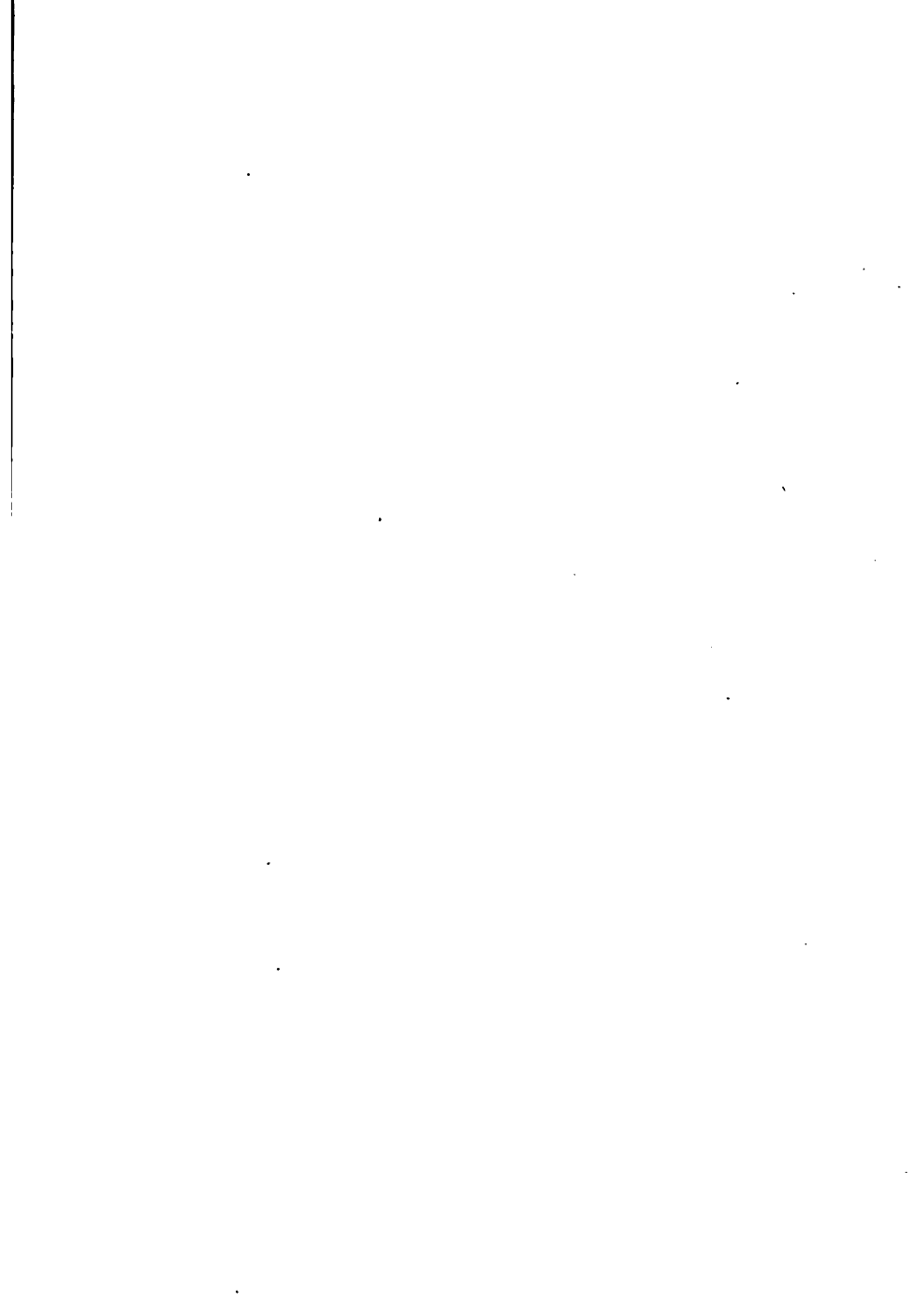
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A STRONG MAN'S HOUSE

A STRONG MAN'S HOUSE

By

FRANCIS NEILSON

Author of

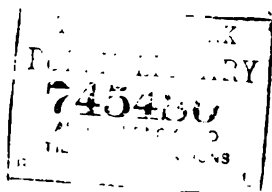
MADAME BOHEMIA, A BUTTERFLY ON THE WHEEL
HOW DIPLOMATS MAKE WAR, ETC.



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A STRONG MAN'S HOUSE

CHAPTER I

THE Right Honorable Sir Alfred Horton-Birkett, M. P., began his commercial career in the office of an old firm of chandlers in Wapping. His parents were poor hard-working non-conformists who had hoped Alfred would go into the ministry of Christ. Their hopes were, however, not realized, for, although Alfred was a good chapel-goer and attended Sunday-school regularly, he longed for material success in a business where there was a chance to rise. "Give me a chance to rise," was Alfred's reply to his father and mother when they urged him to keep his eye on the pulpit.

When he took root in the office of Meek Brothers, Chandlers, he was a bright youth of sixteen. After a year or two he put new life into the old business, and by branching off into oil and coal, he rapidly turned a decaying industry, conducted by two dear old fossils, into a progressive concern. Alfred made headway quickly, and at the age of twenty-three he took himself into the firm.

During those years his mind was not given up entirely to oil and coal. He clung to the chapel, and one day discovered that he could preach a better sermon than the parson. To the joy of his parents, he found the sound of his own clear voice so pleasant, he took

every opportunity to hear it, and after a while he added regular lay-preaching to his accomplishments. It was only a step from the pulpit to the platform, so when an election threw Wapping into the toils of political warfare, Alfred mounted the hustings and tasted a new joy: that of the Radical orator.

What a Radical he was in those days! In the days before he put a hyphen between his mother's name, Horton, and his father's name, Birkett. The Cobbett Radical Club would have no one else for president in the seventies. And the local paper, in an editorial, predicted a great career for him, rather subtly hinting at high office, if he ever found time to go into the House. But Alfred stuck to oil and coal until he was past thirty-five. He had, however, amassed enough at thirty to ask for the hand of the fourth daughter of Sir Evan Willis, the unfortunate knight who lost a small fortune in trying to start that railway from Penrith St. Mary to Dartville that never ran a train. Anyway, Evelyn Willis was a knight's daughter though she was poor, and the Willises were related to prosperous members of the squirearchy. Alfred met her at a bazaar held in aid of the local Radical association. The question of Evelyn's attachment to the Established Church was easily solved by Alfred, who let no difficulty mar his advancement if he could help it, by leaving her with the Anglicans while he remained with the dissenters. She went to church and he went to chapel. If children were to come to them the girls would be little Anglicans and the boys little non-conformists. The arrangement worked singularly well. Even when the great question of Church disestablishment raged over the land, Evelyn took to her pew like

a duck to water, while Alfred went abroad preaching sermons that threatened to bring the tower of Evelyn's church tumbling down upon her head.

Children came with a regularity that pleased Alfred and caused Evelyn little apparent discomfort. Edward John, followed by Ellen; then Harold, Robert and Frederick, came in quick succession. There was then a lapse of four years. Mary Evelyn then came and added a second daughter for the church; and then Alfred Joseph, who lived only three years.

The little villa at Hampstead into which Alfred took his bride was an outgrown shell by the time the fourth child arrived. And Alfred's interests grew so rapidly, his businesses prospered so abundantly, he decided that his next move should be into the heart of the country where he might do the honors of a solvent squire. When the estate Crowington—that manor and all those lands, including a living, etc.—was put up to be sold as a whole or in lots, Alfred bought it and, after repairs and some remodeling of the fine old house, he left Hampstead forever. Six thousand acres in Sportshire, and squire of the estate Crowington was an achievement any Radical might be proud of. But somehow his speeches lost their savor. His sermons contained the old salt, but he did no lay-preaching anywhere near his estate. Evie was not to blame for the change. True, he had risen high in the great councils of non-conformity, and he was looked upon as a very rich and highly distinguished dissenter, but Crowington knew little or nothing of his radical views and sermons on disestablishment. The boys went to a famous public school and a university, but without winning schol-

astic distinction. Harold, in some strange way, became a parson, and raised hopes in his mother's breast that he would some day be vicar of the parish of Crowington. Edward John went into the army. Ellen was peculiar—she was studious, and got in with a strange set at Cambridge. She at eighteen talked of living her own life, of working out her own salvation. At twenty she went to Dresden, and wrote home infrequently, then only for comparatively small sums of money. She became a musician, and said in one of her letters she meant to make a big "bluff" soon at making her own living. The sentiment and slang annoyed her mother, but Alfred showed not the slightest displeasure.

After he was comfortably settled as a squire, Alfred, who had subscribed liberally to the party funds, was offered a safe seat in Parliament. Humberton was indeed a safe Liberal seat. The retiring member, who was an antiquarian and attended the House as seldom as possible, had held the borough for ten years. Alfred accepted the gift, and though he had to fight for the constituency, he won it by a large majority. Though his oratory was not of the rousing kind which Wapping knew in his early days, his purse was better filled and his check-book handier.

It was a great day for Alfred when Evie kissed him after the declaration of the poll. She, undemonstrative as a rule, showed some emotion when four lusty puddlers shouldered her husband and carried him from the Town Hall to the Liberal club. It was no small thing for them to do, for when Alfred stood beside the mayor, on the declaration of the poll, he was a man of some weight. Not tall, but portly; a

huge back falling out from very broad shoulders which supported a neck and head of bullish appearance. The face was heavy, it hung forward and gave the back line from his crown to his waist a bent and lowering look. His thick stocky legs moved without any perceptible action from his knees; his feet slithered a bit, and his toes moved inward, jerkily, as he walked. Sixteen stones, twelve pounds, of solid non-conformity; the corner-stone layer of many a chapel. He was something to carry, and only electioneering enthusiasm could prompt four lusty puddlers to attempt such a feat. They drank immoderately after they were rid of their load.

Fortune, however, carried Alfred through his business career as lightly as if he were gossamer. Some good investments in shipbuilding yards and steel works brought him big returns and, shortly after he entered Parliament, he took a deep financial interest in those firms which cater to the Admiralty and the army. Before the Boer War, Britain had not been engaged in very large military or naval operations since the Crimea, and though sanguinary patriotism was fostered by a few writers and speakers, who had to provide for themselves and their families by earning something somehow or another, there was no particular dread of invasion. In those days Mr. Chamberlain looked for an Anglo-Saxon alliance which would include Germany and the United States of America. France was then a danger to Britain. Fashoda was a word to stir certain writers to their very roots. It was not until the Boer War had been in progress for six months that investments in industries largely devoted to the making of munitions

attracted men like Alfred. The great gun makers, battleship builders, explosive manufacturers, and food and clothing contractors to the army and navy, then suddenly branched out and subdued Government and people. A vast organization with a directorship largely recruited from the services laid the taxpayers low under a crushing burden of armaments. It was an international organization. There was no foolish national spirit about its business methods. English money raised munition works in Fumie and Spezzia as impartially as it did in Kronstadt and Toulon. English shareholders figured in German lists and Germans held stocks in a number of French concerns. It was an international movement for the world's peace.

Alfred was quick to realize the financial importance of the matter, and Parliament was just the place, for one interested in international amity and preparations for war, to foster the proper spirit. An armed peace was the only way to safeguard the interests of the workers, and if dividends resulted from financial investments in armaments, it could easily be proved God was on the side of the right and always looked after the monetary returns of His own.

Small parcels of shares in Sheffield firms, Clyde and Tyneside yards, Alfred bought below par—just to assist the noble movement which bore the text “the best way to keep the peace is to prepare for war.” When the Government scrapped over one hundred and thirty war vessels, some of which had only been launched three years, Alfred bought a few more blocks of shares in the big armament concerns. He always seemed to get in on the ground floor. His nose

was as quick to scent a good dividend as his tongue was ready with a text.

From knighthood to a baronetcy, and then to a privy councilorship, were steps in political and social distinction as rapid as his financial progress. He built a chapel in the East End and endowed a small home for feeble non-conformist parsons. He became president of the council of his denomination and gave large sums to the Church through the bank account of his Anglican wife. He was the founder and organizer of the Haigh Shell and Bullet Company whose shares during the Boer War rose to six pounds, fourteen shillings and six pence.

At the meeting of delegates at the great peace conference held by the dissenters, it was resolved that Sir Alfred Horton-Birkett, then only a knight, was a benefactor of his race in discovering Haigh shells and bullets. Surely that was enough to convince any doubting Thomas. At any rate many people began to look upon Sir Alfred as a "practical" peace-man, for the more shells and bullets his firm turned out, the more foreign friendships Britain made; and when Alfred started a branch factory on the Rhine, near Dusseldorf, the enthusiasm of those shareholders who were the friends of European harmony knew no bounds. Was it any wonder the German Government decorated Alfred and the British Government made him a baronet? No one was so firmly convinced when the first dreadnaught was built and launched, within some thirteen months, as Alfred, that the bigger the battleship the less chance of battle. He wrote a long letter to the *Times*, under a text from Job, explaining the impossibility of war

if the Government would build eight dreadnaughts a year for twenty years. The suggestion met with the approval of nearly all the cautious journals of the two historic parties. One great London journal said the Government should borrow one hundred million pounds to start Alfred's scheme. For some pusillanimous reason the Government did not adopt the suggestion, but shortly after the great controversy petered out, Alfred was asked to join His Majesty's Privy Council. This he did with that humility which sat so well upon a benefactor of the race.

It was in 1908 when Horton House was built, just off Park Lane, on the site of the town house of the extinct Dukedom of Severn. So fine a house had not been built in that neighborhood since the days when South African patriots moved into the palaces of England's owners. The house seemed to anticipate a peerage. Some one said you only had to look at it to see it stand up and ask for it. That cynical person was wrong, however, for neither Alfred nor his property asked for any such thing. Lady Horton-Birkett might have made suggestions of that kind, but only in the interests of her boys and girls. Alfred never. He was above such social traffic. And it must be set down to his credit that every check sent to the party funds was accompanied by a letter saying he looked for no political or social advantage in return for his subscriptions. He did not look for office—his business interests were too great, and his directorships too many and too lucrative for relinquishment in return for a paltry salary. He was the Right Honorable Sir Alfred Horton-Birkett, Bart.,

M. P., squire of Crowington, patron of its living, and the great international director of Haigh shells and bullets. That seemed honor enough for any one in the British political and social world. In religion he was president of the great non-conformist body which had counted him one of its truest and worthiest sons since his youth. Art knew him for the large sums spent by his agent, the art critic of the *Pantheon*, on big canvasses, ancient and modern. Music found him an enthusiastic supporter of oratorio and a determined opponent of any music without a tune. In literature, he boasted first editions of Kipling, and other poetic builders of our literary empire. His taste in daily papers, magazines and reviews was catholic. He took the *Hibbert Journal* and religiously abstained from reading it. The *National Review* he devoured every month. The *Nation* lay on the library table at Crowington, unopened, but the *Saturday Review* often accompanied him on a railway journey.

An easy-going, kindly man was Alfred. He had no real enemies; his friends were legion. His life had been smooth; success had come his way. He was satisfied. In Parliament he spoke occasionally in naval debates; always with that deep conviction that the Government should in the name of peace and patriotism prepare for war as the best means of avoiding a conflict.

CHAPTER II

IN June, 1914, Crowington was at its best. Sir Alfred was down with several friends for a long week-end. Captain Edward found time to leave his regiment for a day or two to be present at the opening of the institute his father had built and was to present to the village. It was to be a gala week for the village; the school treat, the sports and the opening of the institute. Harold, who was now vicar of the parish, had prevailed on the bishop to run over for the day; delicately suggesting a chat with his father who was keenly interested in the bishop's fund for the restoration of the north tower of the cathedral. Crowington had not known in the memory of any one so many notabilities in the parish on one day. The landed gentry who knew Lady Horton-Birkett was a Willis had accepted the family, after the first spasm of indignation passed, on Crowington falling into the hands of a rich dissenting baronet. Harold, too, by going into the church, softened the blow; and the young bloods of the county tolerated the indignity when they learned Edward John was in the Guards and Robert in the Lancers. Lady Horton-Birkett had done wonders in getting around the women of the shire, and Alfred had put not a few hard-pressed squires on to some sound financial things. Life went very well there, and trouble did not pass down the road which ran through Alfred's domain.

On that day of many events Alfred, as was his

rule, rose early, and calling a dog, an old spaniel, he strolled across the park for a ramble before breakfast. On Carrons' Hill he stood and looked back on the house. There was not a cloud in the sky. The place was as still as a colored photograph. He was proud of it, proud of himself and proud of England. A line from *The Village Blacksmith* ran in his mind about something attempted, something done and so on. He, a dissenter, to welcome a bishop, he, a Radical, to give relief to a dozen Tory squires, he, a man of poor parentage, to be squire of Crowington! He nearly stood erect for the first time for thirty years at the thought of it all. A smile of satisfaction crept across the bullish face, and spread a kindly veil over its grossness. Everything was all right. The Government, the navy, the army, his family, and his own aggressive health, were in full fettle.

Save Ellen! Latterly she had often come into his mind. She had written from Berlin that a singer had sung two of her songs at a great concert. But on consideration Alfred decided she must be doing well, making progress. Her demands for money became more and more infrequent. He was sure she would ask for what was necessary to keep her in comfort. Strangely enough she had written saying it was not expensive to live a musical life in Germany. That puzzled the Free Trader in Alfred, upset all his notions of Britain's supremacy as to the purchasing power of money. But Ellen was a queer girl—not a bit like her mother, and no one in Alfred's family that he knew of could have been responsible for Ellen's traits and characteristics.

Neither Chapel nor Mammon seemed to interest her in the least.

Returning to the house he passed a level mead staked off for the sports where the village athletes would compete that afternoon for small prizes. It struck him how curious a thing it was that youths should day after day, for weeks, train to run a race for a two-pound clock or a silver medal. The prize seemed to him inadequate for the exertion. Alfred had never run after the athletic prizes; tennis, cricket and football he had never played. The prizes he had competed for required little muscular strain. He had won without distressing himself.

That afternoon when the institute had been formally opened, and the bishop had given the benediction, the company of members of Parliament, squires and ladies, followed the bishop, the vicar and Alfred, back to the house to see the sports. There in the grounds was a picture of merry England. The young gentry at tennis, the yokels running races and women dancing to the music of the Minster Silver Band. Tea was served in the open. There was no need for a marquee; the weather was perfect. The captain refereed the sports, and Harold fired the starter's pistol. Lord George Windlass, the Liberal Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, distributed the prizes. Old age pensioners sunned themselves on the lawn, and the children of the Sunday-school tumbled about the paddock, under the fruit trees, with oranges and toys in an orgy of joy. Mary Evelyn and Lady Horton-Birkett were in attendance and saw they had plenty of milk and wholesome cakes. The whole affair was done in lordly fashion.

When night fell, and the youngsters were taken off to bed, the village grown-ups danced in the rosy twilight to the band, and from the park could be seen the yellow lights of the dining-room where the great folks were entertained to a fine dinner. The conversation at the table was perhaps of no interest to the dancing throng.

Lord George, as the only member of the Ministry, sat near the bishop who was alarmed at the reports from Ireland.

"Fight us, they won't fight," Windlass scoffed. "There might be a big row, but troops won't be required."

"But the nationalist volunteers," the bishop bleated.

"A Roland for an Oliver—or a Redmond for a Carson—that's all. Don't be alarmed."

"And the Curragh——"

Lord George cut Lady Horton-Birkett off with a snort: "That was playing into our hands with a vengeance. That finished 'em."

"My son, Robert, is in the Lancers."

"Of course, I had forgotten. But he wasn't in the strike, was he?"

"Oh, dear, no," the hostess said. "But he was awfully upset. Poor Robert, he doesn't like the look of things."

"Neither do I, my dear lady," the bishop volunteered. "I don't share Lord George's optimism, I can assure you. Civil war in Ireland! Oh, it makes me tremble to think of it."

Mr. Jennings, the butter-nut king, on the other side of the table, was earnestly debating the labor question with Everand Fentress, the member for

Kettington. Mrs. Harold Horton-Birkett sat between them.

"What is to become of us, I don't know," Jennings said. "The amalgamation of the railway workers, the miners and the transport men in the spring, will be an awful thing, sir. If the railway men alone could bring the trade of the country to a standstill, and then the miners do the same thing, what on earth will happen when they with the transport men all strike together?"

"Don't you think labor will learn it is bad business cutting their noses off to spite their faces?" Fentress suggested. "I'm not afraid."

"Ah, pardon me, Mr. Fentress," Jennings said. "You are not connected with industry. You are an author and well-off, besides——"

"But like you I am solely dependent on labor," Fentress explained. "I have to eat, wear clothes and inhabit a house."

"True, I didn't think of that. But I don't like the situation. It makes me very uneasy, sir. Can't sleep thinking about it, blest if I can."

"Why should men strike when they have families to keep?" Mrs. Harold asked.

It was a question neither Jennings nor Fentress could answer to her satisfaction. Mrs. Harold was a young bride and not familiar with labor questions. She was reared in a county where farm laborers never strike.

All round the table the vital matters of the day were discussed. Here, disestablishment, there, the land question. The great men of affairs were torn into shreds and put together again. There were just

enough Liberals present to save the Government from annihilation. The ladies did not enjoy the feast, and the men did not really get a chance to entertain them. The stress and strum of politics absorbed all the males. In nearly every department of life there seemed to be deep unrest. It was as if England that June were the smiling sides of a volcano ready to burst into flame.

Through the windows the strains of a waltz or quadrille played by the Minster Silver Band floated in on the night breeze which had sprung up. The laborers and young farmers out there did not discuss Ireland, or labor, or land, or disestablishment. They danced, and their women were merry. Merry for a gala-day—one day of joy taken from the long toll of days of toil and anxiety. Though Alfred had repaired cottages, built some new ones, and he had tried to brighten their lot in many patriarchal ways, most of the agricultural folk of Crowington were only British farm laborers after all. Great political problems were of passing interest to some of them, but the vast majority only realized their importance when, in the throes of an election, candidates drummed the issues day and night into their tired minds.

After dinner Alfred took the bishop into his den. The library was too big, too cold, too grave, for the reading and writing Alfred had to do in the country. The den was snug and snoozy. The bishop was a pipe man and liked a good drop of scotch. He was voted by his intimates "a jolly good sort." The den was just the place for him. After explaining his pet scheme, the restoration of the north tower, to Al-

fred, the great dissenter handed him a check which was for a much larger amount than any Anglican had given to that worthy fund. The conversation naturally took a turn toward other building schemes, and the bishop, an infant at commerce, inquired how great fortunes were made. He had never been able to get much out of any investment his solicitors had recommended. There seemed to be a knack about getting into something good. He had a little money laid by, no, not much, a few hundreds, he wished to invest for his only daughter, a rather plain lady of thirty-five. Could Sir Alfred suggest something. He could.

"We are forming a company to start a plant for the making of Haigh shells and bullets at Oporto," Alfred said in his mildest manner. "You might think it over. The peace budgets of certain Governments down that way for many years to come will grow annually. We have already orders enough to keep us busy for five years. You will—your sister will—"

"My daughter——"

"Of course. Your daughter—pardon! She will get at least ten per cent."

"Ten!" cried the bishop in amazement.

"I look for twenty."

"And you will let me place—?" the bishop smiled.

"I shall be delighted. Please keep it to yourself, Bishop."

"Of course, of course, my dear Sir Alfred."

The founder of the Haigh shell closed his hands, just as he used to do when he entered the pulpit and gave an exhibition of silent prayer and sighed wearily.

"You see we are obliged to give our companies a national appearance," he said. "I dislike deception of all kinds. But with so many evil-minded persons abroad, around about us I mean, we must be cautious. This factory will be called the Oporto Steel Construction Company. Really we shall hold eighty-five per cent. of the stock and let in a select few to hold the other fifteen. Our German, French, Russian, Austrian, Italian and Japanese plants are firmly established on a thriving basis. Our boards of directors contain some of the world's greatest admirals and generals. So we have the very best expert advice at all times. Just send me a line when you are ready."

"Thank you, my dear Sir Alfred, I am deeply grateful—deeply, I assure you."

"Not at all, Bishop, I'm glad to find you realize fully the tendency of the times. The old gospel of Bright and Cobden is gone forever. Britain must arm to keep the peace. It is the only way. An armed peace may be expensive, but money wisely spent on insurance is never wasted."

Another pipe, and another whisky, and the bishop went up-stairs to join his sleepy wife.

In his mother's room Edward John lay stretched on the sofa, smoking a Russian cigarette, while she tried to revive the bloom of other years by smearing her face with some heavily scented, greasy-looking concoction.

"Hurry up, mater."

Edward John learned to call her mater when he was a little boy at Hampstead where at that time

mother was fast supplanting mama with the lower classes.

"Hurry up, mater. I'm devilish tired. What d'you want to see me about?"

"Ed, dear, have you and Clarice fixed a day yet?" she asked, referring to the coming marriage of her son to Clarice Peplowe Clungford of Clungford Hall.

"No, not yet. Well, yes, about the middle of October, I think. Why?"

"October?"

"Yes. Clarice wants to wait till Billy gets back from India. Things are awkward out there. Deuce of a lot of sedition, and his regiment won't get back now before the end of September. Rotten, eh?"

"Why she can't be married without her brother—"

"I know. But she likes Billy. Drunken swine."

"Ed!"

"Sorry, mater. That's what he's called."

"Well, I s'pose it can't be helped," she said, referring to the nuptial delay. "Now listen, dear: There's one thing I want you to do to-morrow. It's not often you get a chance to talk to dad. Now you've got him, just put in a word about the Lords."

Ed sprang from the sofa and pitched his cigarette end into the fireplace. There he leaned on the mantel and gazed into the large cineraria which occupied the grate.

"Don't be obstinate, Ed," she pleaded. "It is high time the P. M. did something. I quite expected to see dad get a peerage in the last list. You know how busy he is and apt to forget these things. Besides, you ought to look after your own interests. Do poke him up about it. This Government will

only have two more honors' lists, and you know what an awful crowd there is to get things before a dissolution. Hasn't dad earned it?"

"I suppose so," Ed sighed. "But it's a beastly nuisance."

"You must think of Clarice."

"She doesn't care any more for that kind of thing than I do. Anyway, I mean to stick to the army. It's going to be my career."

"But a barony would not interfere with your soldiering."

Ed snorted as he strode toward a box of matches. He puffed for a moment at a cigarette and gasped, "Father, a peer!"

"I thought you would be obstinate," his mother put in testily. "You wouldn't budge once you got an idea into your head when you were a boy. You haven't altered, Ed."

"All right, all right, mater, if you have your heart set on it, all right," he muttered, as he paced the room. "To-morrow. Well, good night."

"That's a dear boy."

They kissed and parted.

Sunday was spent quietly. The company went to church to hear Harold preach. It was beautifully fine and warm. Alfred enjoyed the peace and plenty of his estate.

The next day was June twenty-ninth. The only news in the paper at breakfast of any particular interest, apart from the usual political questions, was about the murder of an Austrian archduke.

"Where's Serajevo?" Alfred asked, as he knocked the top off his egg.

CHAPTER III

THE notabilities left Crowington by the ten forty-three for town. Edward John drove over to Clungford to see Clarice. His chestnut pounded down the hill to Press Heath under a canopy of splendid oaks and elms. Edward flicked leaves as he rattled along, and whistled a popular tune. At the crossroads he had to pull up to help a man who was having a bad time with a fractious horse. He walked the chestnut toward the scene.

"Hullo, that you, Herbert?" he called, as he recognized his friend, Count Herbert Von Holst.

"Ed! It's you!" the count returned. "What a mess. A partridge. Right under his nose. Fine youngster, isn't he? Deuced angry about it. Threw me before I knew where I was."

The company of Edward's chestnut soothed the count's horse.

"Where are you off to?" Herbert asked.

"To Clungford. Didn't know you were down here?"

"Just for a day or two. I've had to get a new man to look after my gees. Irish. From Tittle Shaunessey's place. I'm on my way to Scotland yachting."

"Take the gee back and I'll drive you over to see Clarice."

"Can't, dear boy; sorry. I've got to catch the two-nine. When is it coming off, Ed?"

"Middle of October. Don't forget. Where'll you be about that time?"

Count Herbert thought for a moment.

"Shooting in Derbyshire. Near by. I'll be with you on that day."

"A best man is as a rule," Edward said.

Von Holst kept his mount still while he admired Ed's horse. He said, "That chestnut can stand, can't he?"

"Yes. Well, if I can't persuade you. Tol-lol."

The chestnut passed smoothly into its stride as Edward looked round and saw the count mount and ride off toward his hunting-box.

Edward and the count met at the university. They were soon close friends. Both riders and oarsmen they stuck together. It was Edward who persuaded the count to take Wilmslow Lodge, a roomy hunting-box with excellent stables only four miles from Crowington. They had been neighbors for six years.

Clarice was looking out for Edward as he turned into the drive at Clungford. He eased the mare and she was up in a moment beside him.

"You're late, old boy," she said, after she kissed him.

"Met Herbert at Press Heath having a dust up with a young hunter," he explained.

"Herbert. Really! I didn't know he was down. It's early for him, isn't it? He doesn't get to Wilmslow as a rule much before November."

"Got a new man. On his way north for yachting."

"What's he think of the murder?"

"What murder?"

"The archduke."

"Oh! Don't know."

"Horrible, isn't it?"

"Yes. Those Servians again, wasn't it?"

"There's mother," she cried, as she spied a small woman limping down the terrace steps. "Poor old girl, I hope she'll be all right for this season."

Her mother had missed a hunting season owing to a bad toss over barbed wire. Her leg was badly wrenched.

"Well, Ed, my boy," Lady Clungford cried, as the captain threw the reins to the groom. "Excuse my gammy leg. A bit of crock yet. How goes it?"

"All right. Dad had a mixed lot over the week-end. The bishop. Oh, and—you know dad's crowd. Windlass was there. Mother sent her love."

Lady Clungford was a widow, her husband died of pneumonia in Africa, after chasing De Wet for six months. He was a good soldier, and left his family well-off. Billy, the present lord, took after his grandfather and did some soldiering between drinks. Freddy, the other son, was something permanent in the Foreign Office. Then there was Clarice. She was a handsome girl. Nearly all her life had been spent in her native hunting county. Save for a month in London, when she was presented, and holidays spent in Ireland with her aunt, the Dowager Marchioness of Kilkee, she knew very little of the world beyond the kingdom. Her grandmother left her eighty thousand pounds, so she was well-off. Clarice was one of those interesting girls who attract men, because they are womanly; she had no acquired accomplishments. Her knowledge of music, pictures

and literature was small. In sport, riding, shooting, rowing and swimming, she was as proficient as the majority of the men in the county.

Her father was her ideal of a man, as a husband, a friend and a soldier. Edward was a soldier, a good soldier. That was his great merit in her eyes. Lady Clungford said he had the making of a man in him after the kind of her husband. "He wouldn't have had a dog's chance with Clarice if he had been anything but a soldier," she wrote to Billy, "though there's a good strain in him. He's a Willis—mother's side—crossed with money and dissent, but he doesn't show it scarcely at all. His father has the gift of the gab, but Ed doesn't bark. He's rather like that collie your father loved so much that went about his business without fuss or noise. I like him. He's a jolly good sort and will make Clarice happy."

Clungford was called a "dear old place." Planted long ago on the side of a ridge of hills heavily wooded, it stood guard of a valley which shelved gently down to the River Wene. The house was sixteenth century, but there must have been an abbey there long before that time.

When Clarice had shown Edward the gees, they strolled down to the stream and got into a punt.

"Where are we going to live?" she asked.

He had not given the matter a thought. She knew he hadn't. Her question was a bit of a shock.

"Live? Oh, where you like. Anywhere," he muttered.

"Anywhere won't do, will it? There's the army, you know," she mused.

"Rather."

"It must be in the country, Ed," she nodded emphatically. "But where? If the Guards would only stay in one spot. Are you going to be moved about much?"

"Don't know. Don't think so." He lit a cigarette. "There's nothing much going on at present. Anyway, we're going to Munich for our wedding trip."

"That's fixed, old boy. So you mean to leave finding a place to settle in to me, eh?"

"Mean to? What good would I be?"

"Mother's been at me for a month about it. Herbert's got the place I really want. Wilmslow Lodge fixed up a bit would fit me like a glove."

"Ripping. Let's ask him to get out."

"Pretty hard on Herbert. He's properly gone on the place, Edward!"

He knew something serious was in her mind when she used his Christian name. He leaned forward and took her hands. She looked at him for a moment and shook her head.

"I don't know whether I shall love the army so much when we are married, old boy. Will it take you away from me—much? I mean often?—for long?"

He blew on the hot end of his cigarette, and then looked up quickly to see if she were joking. He was puzzled. She had surprised him. There was a light in her eyes he had never seen before; in a moment he was on his knees and she fast in his arms. It was the first very real confession she had made to him.

"Well, sweetheart, make your mind up to this," he whispered. "Where the regiment goes, you go, too."

Later in the afternoon he drove her over to Crowington to dine with his mother. When they reached Press Heath he answered to her whim to go round by Wilmslow to look at the Lodge. They could see the house from the road. Neither she nor Edward had been round that way since the hunting season. Now, to their amazement, a lot of building was going on. Bricklayers, masons and carpenters were at work on a new wing to the house.

"What's going on?" Edward asked a foreman who came down to the gate.

"The count's putting a new wing on, sir. Some say he's going to get married about cubbin' time, sir," the foreman replied, touching his cap to Clarice and Edward.

They drove on in silence for a long way.

"Funny, isn't it?" she asked.

"Wonder what's up," he mused. "Never dropped a hint to-day when I saw him. Married?"

"But Evelyn?"

"Nothing in that. She's in town. Haven't seen her for weeks."

"I don't know. Herbert's jolly fond of her. The Cricket would keep it mum, Ed."

The Cricket was a pet name of his sister Mary Evelyn. She could make a sound by compressing her lips which was so like a cricket that her intimates dubbed her by that name. Being the youngest of the family she was looked on as the baby, even when she went her own way. Count Herbert and she had been very good friends, but he was over thirty and she was under twenty. She was the baby, though she was plus two and played golf for England. Quite

spoiled everybody said. Alfred idolized her. Her mother gave her anything she asked for.

Life went very well for the hunting set in that fair land. Courtship, marriage plans, wedding trips and houses to live in, occupied their thoughts. Broad lands, fine manors and more money than they could spend; all the pleasures that could be wished for. The future was secure, and love knew no obstacles, no material hindrances.

Edward took Clarice home in the motor at eleven. When he returned he went up to his mother's room. She was treating her face to the youth and beauty preparation.

"Did you have a chat with dad?" she asked.

"Yes. He said he couldn't be bothered, but he will all the same."

"Is he keen?"

"He's picked his title."

"What?"

"Lord Humberton of Crowington. He tried to make a joke of it, but I could see he meant it all right."

"Humberton of Crowington," she muttered, examining her face in the glass.

"A bit clumsy, what?"

"It's not bad, Ed. His constituency and his estate. But how much better to take old aunty's place for a title. Haughmond is a fine old ruin with many historical associations." She referred to the place her aunt had left her ten years before—a small estate in Wessex, yielding an income of about two thousand pounds a year.

"Heard anything of the Cricket, lately?" Ed asked.

"She's with Aunt Martha in town."

"Seen much of Herbert?"

"Oh, a good deal. Why?"

"Nothing."

"Ed, you've heard."

"What?"

"About the Cricket?"

"Going to be married?"

"Who told you?"

"No one told me she was going to be married. What's up, mater? Come on, out with it."

"Don't tell a soul. Well, she's going to marry Herbert soon after you and Clarice get off my hands."

"Why, the deuce——"

"Don't blame me. It's all her doing. She wouldn't let us tell a soul, and she made Herbert swear he wouldn't tell any one until you were married. You know what a lark she is. She said your affair was to be the *pièce de résistance*. We could make as big a splurge on her as we like after you and Clarice got settled."

"How long have they been engaged?"

"Six weeks."

"So that's why Herbert's written a dozen times in the past month to know the date of our do. Dear old chap."

"What d'you think, Ed? He has settled Wilmslow on her already."

"Settled——"

"Yes—and a big allowance besides."

Ed whistled, got up and stretched himself, yawned and kissed his mother.

CHAPTER IV

IN the village of Crowington there lives a man who in his early years fought the battle for dissent against the squirearchy and the establishment. Thomas Tonks, now eighty-three and in possession of all his faculties, is one of the last of the Ironsides who triumphed over squire and vicar. When he was a lad no one dare let it be known that any one in that village leaned toward non-conformity. The church, the squire's church, was the one place for worship, the only place for baptism, marriage and funeral. Tonks' father and mother were buried in Anglican soil though their coffins contained the bodies of non-conformists. Thomas and his brothers and sisters were baptized in the old church though their parents knew, according to the vicar who sprinkled them, they would go to hell if they died in dissent.

How Thomas Tonks at twenty-two became possessor of an acre and a half of land right in the center of Crowington village is an old story. Formerly the land belonged to an old widow, a devout Anglican, who had an only son, a thriftless drunken fellow who worked as an hostler in the capital town, Minsterley. The old lady was dying and Tonks' mother ministered to her bodily needs. She learned from her patient that her bit of property would go to her son. Now Thomas went to Minsterley once a week with produce, and after learning from his mother that the land and house of the old lady would pass

to her son, he looked up the dissolute hostler, and got him to sign away his interest in his mother's estate for four hundred pounds, to be paid in instalments with fifty pounds down. The hostler readily entered into the bargain.

When Thomas returned home that night he learned the old lady had died at noon that day—several hours before her son had signed the agreement. Early the next morning Thomas with fifty pounds set out for Minsterley and took the hostler, as sober as ever he was in his life, to an attorney who did business for dissenters. The matter was legally transacted and Thomas returned to his home to break to his family the happiest news they ever heard.

They moved into the house they had bought and in four years they paid the last instalment to the hostler who was fast drinking himself to death. From the day their lawyer in Minsterley assured them that the land and house were really their "very own," the Tonks family never set foot in church again.

How the squire and vicar contested the sale and worried and harried the dissenters who defied them and every Sunday conducted a service in their parlor, is an oft told tale. But nevertheless the fight was carried on for years. Indeed the case was mentioned in the House of Commons in the debate on Burial Grounds.

Now, any Sunday, more people assemble for worship in Tonks' Chapel, built in a corner of that famous acre and a half, than ever go to the church. Yes, even now when the Reverend Harold Horton-Birkett, son of the squire and vicar of Crowington, preaches on a Saint's Day.

But in all the years of Alfred's rule of the estate of Crowington he never set foot in Tonks' Chapel. Time turns many victories into defeats. Old Thomas, called the Ironside, was passing down the vale with head bowed, sorrowing for the change that could make such a man as Alfred Horton-Birkett, President of the Grand Council of United Dissenters. In the graveyard of Tonks' Chapel there lay the bones of such men and women as Jacob Birkett and Elspeth Horton, the parents of Alfred, some of the salt of Britain. Old Thomas thought the change came when dissent triumphed and had no longer a spiritual battle to wage. From his loins had gone into the world a large family, five sons and four daughters, all raised on that acre and a half, less the space the chapel and the house occupied. They scratched the earth all the year round, and every Thursday, market day at Minsterley, their long cart at three o'clock winter and summer morning went laden with greens, fruits and flowers. They believed in that bounty of God that yields to man's sense and understanding of His earth.

Ebenezer Tonks, the eldest son of Thomas, was now the active head of the family. Ebenezer had become a small farmer, leasing thirty acres outside the village. He had two sons and six daughters; in the epidemic of diphtheria which ravaged the country in the nineties he lost two boys and a girl. Four daughters were married and away in the towns, two remained at home and assisted their father. Harry, the younger lad, was in Manchester in an architect's office. Benjamin had been to Ruskin College and was now engaged in London writing for a labor

paper. He had published a novel which had met with some success.

A small volume of verse was favorably noticed in the weekly reviews. He made a living writing and lecturing in and about London. The family was proud of him.

Benjamin was a fine-looking man. Tall, athletic and enthusiastic. The strong sense of social injustice burned fiercely in him. The rosy hope of early drastic reform gave him the radiance of the happy idealist. People liked him. There was something rousing, cheering, in his personality, and a rich humor softened his opponents when political antagonism ran high. He was a peace-and-plenty-for-workers man.

When he was a lad he met Ellen Horton-Birkett at Minsterley Flower Show. Ellen was in tears. She had lost her brothers who had been taken in to see the show. In the midst of the big flower tent she stood in great distress, having searched the grounds for an hour in vain to find her party. They had gone on early to get good seats where the horse-jumping display would take place. But the jumping was over, and evening was coming on. Poor little Ellen, too proud to let any one think she was lost had bravely hidden her fears. Tired and hungry, she at length went back to the tent where she and her brothers with their guardian were all together just before she lost sight of them. Benjamin bought tea and cakes for her and cheered her up. When night fell and none of her party could be found, he started off with her the long eleven miles to Crowington. He had cycled into the show. The journey home was slow and tiresome. Sometimes on the

- step, sometimes on the saddle while Ben pushed the machine, then riskily seated with her legs hanging over the handlebars while he rode, then walking a stretch, they at length reached the gates of Crowington at eleven-thirty, worn out.

Ben never forgot his return from Minsterley Flower Show, and he and Ellen grew up fast friends. Indeed, after she went away to Germany they kept up a correspondence.

Ben was one of the new men who believed economic change must be brought about by a revolution in culture. It is not enough, so these new men believe, to teach the workers the simple economics of the system of "bind and grind," if an industrial revolution without bloodshed is to be of permanent value. Something else is necessary. Teachers, like himself, must point the way to new delights, and show the masses that economic change will mean far more than less hours of labor and the full value of the product going to the producer. This something else was cultural and artistic. It was a deep belief in the power of music, literature and art to unify and consolidate the masses of workers. These things he held were vital. But land and capital did next to nothing with the wonders of symphony and song, books and pictures. There were indeed great national libraries and galleries, and many large towns had municipal books and pictures. But there stood the big buildings, most days, silent and lonely. Life devoid of music, literature and art was worse than death to these new men. And when they came upon the political industrial scene they found the workers shockingly ignorant of those joys which were in

many places within their grasp. Few men had attempted to tell them what they were missing. No one had succeeded in telling them so that they understood. The classical men had failed in their attempts for they talked to tired workers as if they were freshmen in a university lecture room. Morris had approached the mass nearer than any one else.

When Ben wrote his novel on housing conditions in mining districts he raised the whole of this question of labor and art in such a way that the appeal reached those Radical politicians who had for many years striven to rouse the workers without much success. Ben's idea caught on. "Art and economics" became a platform phrase as popular as "land for the people." Labor societies began to publish cheap editions of good drama, fine literature, and in their newspapers, music and pictures were dealt with to greater public advantage than great critics did in the well-known journals and weeklies. Political education took another turn; their platform became a living thing. Away from the superficial questions of party strife down to fundamentals and up to broad appeals for leisure and abundance so that men and women who work might know and appreciate the best of the artists' mind.

Ellen in Germany and Ben in Britain kept in touch, and this question was the one great theme of most of their letters. She was a musician and a rebel. Ben thought she was too advanced, far too much for a woman of the ruling class. Much of her writing alarmed him. She scoffed at politicians and priests; and when she begged him to work away from all political parties and churches he was sorely puzzled.

Six years of life on the Continent had worked a great change in her. She was twenty-eight or nine. When he took her home from Minsterley Show he was fifteen and she was about twelve. He felt he had known her for a long, long time. When she went away he was in London doing secretarial work for Lord Spenhouse, the Chairman of the Children's Recreation Committee of the London County Council. He knew she was leaving England, but he did not expect a note from her saying she was leaving "to-morrow at nine from Charing Cross," and an invitation to take dinner with her and go to the theater to see Ibsen's *Vikings*. Ben readily accepted her invitation, and he enjoyed the evening. But he never at any time since the Minsterley meeting got away from the fact that she was the squire's daughter and he the son of a small farmer. He would have blushed to admit such a thing. But so ingrained is the line of division in agricultural folk that no university education or social associations in political life in London, can quite wipe it out of the mind. He loved her, but he never dreamed of telling her. What was the good? She was not of his class. In the years before he left Crowington to go on his scholarship to Minsterley High School, and she went away to study the fiddle under Brodskin in Manchester, they were good friends, though they met infrequently, on the road as a rule, never yielding to the desire to talk together for long. It was a friendship which ripened on glad smiles: an understanding between them that they were comrades. Her first appearance as a violinist in public took place at a concert given in the Parish School in aid of the

Sick Nursing Fund, and he played her accompaniment in the absence of the church organist who had been taken suddenly ill. That happened only a few months before they left Crowington, but the incident seemed to bring them into closer touch, it forged a bond of friendship which absence did not break.

Ben had often thought of that night in London before she left for the Continent. She drank burgundy, and smiled at his surprise. She smoked a cigarette, and chaffed him for his abstinence. Something she said about sprouting wings nettled him. And what did she mean by saying so often, she meant to live her own life and escape from the slavery of British domestic intercourse. It was all very strange. He was afraid. Was she inclined to be wild? Many times she wrote suggesting he should visit Dresden. A few months there would do a lot for him, she said. He thought the crowd she was with more rebellious, bohemian and advanced than any he knew of in Britain. But she was making her way on the concert platform, and as a song writer and composer of charming pieces of music, she had done well.

Ben did not know what Ellen meant. Ellen, however, knew what she meant. To a young scientist of some distinction, a Russian who had been with Metchnikoff in Paris, she laid her soul bare. This young man stormed the citadel of Ellen's heart for two years without making the slightest impression. Then she told him. "It's no use," she said, "still I ought to tell you. What you want is impossible. I picked the man I want years ago. Yes, I was only sixteen when I made up my mind about that. And no one else has ever made me flinch, though at any time

since, the man I chose at sixteen could have taken me. But he doesn't know. Perhaps he will never know."

Ellen's life in Dresden was one of hard labor. She lived frugally. Two small rooms and music. She knew she could never be a great artist, she knew she never could be much of a composer. But she toiled on. She was a musician, and that at last she was content to be. Her recreations were general knowledge. She wrote on music and pictures, and studied history and politics. Her friends were many and of her own making. At no time did she spend money to win them, and use her father's name and influence to meet people. Such expedients she scorned. The friends she had were hers and made by her own merit and personality.

Was Ellen pretty? No, she was elfish. Slight, pale, short—just over five feet, she was not a woman of the beauty class. But she was all fire and zeal. Bright, dark gray eyes, a fine nose and a strong mouth were the striking features of her face. Her health was perfect. Her wiry little body knew no aches and pains.

Her portrait was painted by Ruench. A weird composition of somber tones against dark red drapery. The white face, the hand on the bow, the glossy fiddle, were arresting lights in many deep shadows. The picture was shown at the Glass Palace exhibition at Munich, and was bought by an American art dealer. Ben had a photogravure of it.

CHAPTER V

AT the meeting of the board of directors of the Haigh Shell and Bullet Company there assembled some of Britain's greatest men. Lord Trebleswale was as usual the first director to reach the company's offices. He was a peace man and a vice-president of the Grand Council of International Churches. A Tory by birth and tradition, but in middle life a Whig in domestic politics. He could tell you, offhand, the military and naval estimates of any first-class Power since the days of Palmerston. As for the change in equipment, the size of the guns, and the weight of a broadside of a battleship—he was an authority. The second to enter the directors' room was his old friend Sir Redvers Foote, an admiral of distinction in the days when the British fleet bombarded Alexandria. General Saintsbury came in with Mr. Leverton. The general had been something at Woolwich arsenal, and what he did not know of ordnance was not worth bothering about. Mr. Leverton, as every one should know, was the senior partner in the firm of Doubleton, Swindon, and Leverton. They carried on business all over the world, contractors and financiers in close touch with all first-class Governments. The Earl of Cintoul had been connected with a lot of companies, some were not in the hands of receivers: he was a useful member of the board, however, for he seemed to get on so well with all the people at the War Office and

the Admiralty. Doctor Haigh must not be forgotten; the doctor was a great chemist, the discoverer of the famous yellow fume, the noiseless cap, and the inventor of the Haigh shell and bullet.

Sir Alfred was the chairman of the board.

It was a beautiful morning toward the end of June when the directors met to consider the question of issuing the prospectus of the Oporto Steel Construction Company, and to consider the prospects of setting up a plant in Dalmatia. It was the first meeting of the board since Mr. Clinton made his speech on armament firms in the House of Commons, and naturally the directors of the Haigh Shell and Bullet Company felt some embarrassment on meeting one another. They knew, of course, that Clinton was only a Radical whose chief desire in life was to set class against class, and whose interpretation of their holdings of shares in the great armament firms arose from sheer prejudice and envy. Clinton had gathered together a lot of information about their international armament relationships which he gave away in his speech on the navy estimates in such a way that one Liberal, two labor and three religious papers took alarm, and in their leaders of the time said some nasty things about their interest in blood money. The directors felt that their best intentions had been maliciously misunderstood. Clinton had not given them credit for their peaceful endeavors. They felt hurt and discouraged. The attack that had been made on their chairman, who held so high a position in the great body of dissenters, was extremely vindictive. They meant to pass a resolution of sympathy with Sir Alfred and in it express their strongest

disapprobation of Clinton's scurrilous methods of trying to gain some notoriety.

When Sir Alfred entered the room (he was always a few minutes late, business with the manager always detained him until the rest of the board had assembled), Lord Trebleswale was the first to press his hand. To the surprise of the rest of the directors Sir Alfred was as happy and confident as usual. Perhaps he forgot the attack Clinton had made; being a very busy man it no doubt had passed out of his mind.

He had a marvelous way with him. A glance at the agenda was quite sufficient. He seemed to know all the business they were there to discuss, he even anticipated all the questions that might be put. Tables of figures in tons and sterling came trippingly from his tongue, and the names of foreign directors and places were as familiar to him as the names of his children. As a statistician he was quite as able as the redoubtable gentleman in the Commons who made a very good living in compiling tables of statistics from one year's end to another. When the business of the meeting was concluded, Trebleswale and Leverton drew Sir Alfred aside to discuss a matter which was not ripe for the ears of the other directors. It was about the new harbor which the Government hoped to make in the Orkneys. Leverton had urged the necessity of building this harbor ever since the present Government had been in office. Now the rumor which had been set abroad that the Government intended to drop the scheme caused Leverton some uneasiness, and he felt that a great injustice might be done to the Trebleswale estate which owned

the land and the sea front, the site of the proposed harbor. It would be a monstrous thing for the Government to neglect the defenses of the country by abandoning a naval position whose strategic importance was vital to the safety of the empire.

"It places me in rather an awkward position," Trebleswale explained, "for one does not like to ask the Government to buy one's land—though every naval expert agrees that it is just the very spot the country should acquire."

"Quite so," Sir Alfred nodded. "Very awkward indeed. I see your position. But what can I do?" he asked, turning to Leverton.

"Couldn't a question or two be put in the House?" Leverton suggested. "Couldn't we get some of our men to question the First Lord?"

"Yes, that might be done," Sir Alfred agreed. "But I must warn you, the question of the Government buying land for harbors and training grounds meets with merciless scrutiny just now, owing to the Stonehenge Plain sale for a training ground for soldiers."

"That was not a nice business," Trebleswale said with emphasis. "The Government was swindled."

"But a new North Sea harbor is essential," Leverton put in, gravely shaking his head and pursing his lips. "Some of the land of Stonehenge Plain was sold at over one hundred years' purchase. Now the land for the harbor in the Orkneys can be bought at sixty-eight years' purchase. A very moderate figure considering the needs of the empire."

"Very moderate," Sir Alfred echoed. "And the scheme fits in with my plan of national security. I don't know whether you saw my article in the

Trafalgar Review on coast defenses where I criticized the laxity of the Defense Committee in neglecting what I called the ante-room of the North Atlantic. Now I think Cromarty is not far enough north, and Rosyth is too far south. We need a base as far north as we can go. If we had it, then the other naval harbors would have real strategic value. I'll see what I can do."

The chairman and his fellow directors parted company feeling that they had done their best to save their country from an unnecessary war. Lord Trebleswale motored off to his club, the Pantheon, for lunch. Mr. Leverton took a bus to Whitehall and dropped off at the Admiralty where his friend the Honorable Harry Jerningham, permanent secretary to the board of contractors, was waiting to see him. Sir Alfred got into his motor and went to his club on the Embankment. There he partook of a chop and an tankard of light ale. After forty winks in the smoke room he walked across to the offices of the Grand Council of Dissenters and presided over a meeting which was to settle the plans for the entertainment of the missionaries from Turkestan. The Reverend Jones Glynn Smith offered up a prayer which deeply moved the chairman. It was so full of appreciation of God's bounty, and the care He had taken in Turkestan of the lives of the men connected with the mission. Sir Alfred had to hasten away to the dissenters' education committee, there to protest against the intrusion of an Anglican vicar on the premises of a county school in the south. It was rather a bad case, and one that gave great offense to those who desired simple Bible instruction in the schools. It

was not to be expected that a man who was financially responsible for sending ten missionaries among the heathen of Turkestan should take lightly the question of a vicar of the establishment daring to set foot in an undenominational school. The committee decided to send a deputation to see the prime minister about it. Then Sir Alfred had just time enough to take his seat in the House before prayers which he always attended when he had a question down on the order paper, to be put soon after the service. That day the question was to inquire whether the cruisers repairing at Gibraltar were to be withdrawn from the Mediterranean fleet. The debate of the day was on swine fever, and as Sir Alfred left his hogs to the care of the manager of his farm, he did not wait to hear the weighty speech of the prosy member for Sportshire who was an authority on that disease. In the smoke room Sir Alfred met his old friend Sir Fergus Paulton, the member for Nitworth: the man who had traveled far in China, Persia, Africa and India. Round about them lolled many members glancing through the first editions of the evening papers. In the far room members pored over chess boards, draught boards and illustrated papers. Torys and Liberals, Unionists and Nationalists, fraternized together, and smoked their pipes over many a knotty problem in draughts and chess. In that room Democracy was seen at its best. After Sir Alfred had finished his cigar and coffee, he strolled off to the dining-room to see the manager of the refreshment department about a little dinner for eight which he had ordered for that evening at seven forty-five. When everything was settled to his satisfaction he sought the

terrace where he expected to tea one of the leaders of a non-militant suffrage society and the secretary of the United Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Birds. On the terrace before his guests arrived he ran into old Lord Parkgate who was taking an airing before the crowd appeared.

"Well, Birkett, how are you?" his lordship asked. He had known Sir Alfred since the days of Wapping, before the hyphen united the houses of Horton and Birkett. Indeed Lord Parkgate was the candidate Sir Alfred supported in that bye-election which gave him a taste for Radical oratory. Parkgate had not then inherited the title; he was the Honorable Algernon Dee, a thoroughgoing Radical of the Bentham school.

"How goes the shell business?"

"Very well," Sir Alfred said. "We are extending our influence all over Europe."

"You're mad all the same," his lordship said, snickering and shrugging his shrunken shoulders. "There'll be the damdest bust up soon the world has ever seen. You mark my words, Birkett."

"You amaze me. How can there be a bust up? All the first-class countries are so well prepared no one dare fire a shot. Don't you see? That is what I have been working for all these years, and I think I can congratulate myself that I have proved conclusively that the best way to preserve peace is to prepare for war."

"Oh! You can, can you?"

Parkgate stopped, and clasping his hands behind his back, he steadily surveyed Sir Alfred over the upper

rim of his glasses, which always rested on the very tip of his nose.

"Nonsense, I never know quite whether you fellows are consciously mad or unconsciously crazy. You talk like mad men, but to all appearances you seem to be rational. So all the nations are so heavily armed no one dare fire a shot? That's it, is it? Well, let me tell you I am still one of the old school, and I know where your foreign policy is leading you. I know where your jingo press is urging you to go. I know the sentiments of these chaps in the army and navy. I have one son in the navy, one in the War Office, one in the Foreign Office—or rather he's now at Rome—two sons-in-law in the army, and three daughters in—oh, damn it! society. My sources of information are as good as yours. So let me tell you, one of these fine days, those guns loaded with your confounded shells will go off and set Europe in a blaze. And I'm not the only man who thinks that way."

It was a line of argument that Sir Alfred never liked. Somehow he felt embarrassed when any one opened up that question. He was convinced in his own mind there was no danger, but he did not like to know that well-informed men hugged the belief that his policy was a dangerous one. All the leading statesmen of Europe talked peace, and there never was a notion so popular as that of an armed peace preventing war. Lord Parkgate always seemed to upset him; the old peer did not regard him from the same view-point as the vast majority of his friends. Parkgate had no money in armaments. That was perhaps the reason why he could not see eye to eye with Sir Alfred. Then Parkgate always seemed to

remind him of the days when he was an oil and coal merchant in Wapping. The old gentleman never referred to it, but Sir Alfred always thought of it when he was in his company.

"You are as keen, I am sure, as I am for the safety of the empire," Sir Alfred said, "and I believe that you would not hesitate to make any sacrifice to maintain our island's supremacy."

Parkgate watched him narrowly, his old eyes flashing something like a sparkle of merry light. "Now we have great competitors," Sir Alfred continued, "and in these days the rush for new markets forces us to be prepared for any emergency."

"Birkett, please, do remember that you are not addressing an audience of armament share-holders, nor apologizing to a congregation of dissenters for belligerent motives," his lordship remarked caustically. "I am fortunately too sophisticated for that kind of thing. You are only deluding yourself."

Just at that moment the suffragette fluttered up to Sir Alfred and took possession of him. Parkgate speedily recognized the cut of the young lady, and being an out and out opponent of Woman's Suffrage he beat a hasty retreat toward the Lords' end of the terrace. It was about half past four and the tea tables were rapidly filling up. It was a lovely afternoon, so clear the sky, that the dome of St. Paul's stood out boldly in the thin haze lying far away to the east. On the balconies of St. Thomas' Hospital patients could be seen waving their hands to the passengers on a river boat. In the river, near the terrace wall, a number of young men and women were giving an exhibition, for the benefit of mem-

bers, of a life-saving collar. Their antics in the water were vastly amusing. A motor-boat sped along the river at thirty-five miles an hour and disappeared under Westminster Bridge; the people on the bridge moved like a swift black cloud from one side to the other to watch it pass down the stream. From the west a steam launch headed for the terrace wall, and as it got near, the cry of "Suffragettes" passed along from table to table. The launch stopped, and from the roof of its saloon a woman addressed the people on the terrace. For ten minutes the fun was fast and furious, but the appearance of a fast approaching police-boat put the suffragette launch to flight, and the people on the terrace scrambled back to their tables and resumed their tea. It was a merry, careless, prosperous throng. A sight that can not be seen in any other capital in Europe. The terrace of the House of Commons on a fine June afternoon is unique.

Later in the day Sir Alfred set to work to keep his promise to Mr. Leverton that he would find some young men to put down questions on the order paper about the proposed scheme of a naval harbor in the Orkneys. He found young Henry Everton Hales, a Tory, an enthusiastic Imperialist and a big navy man, who eagerly took the tip and promised to question the First Lord. Hales was like so many young men in the House bold in his desire for a strong navy. They could see nothing else but sinister designs on the empire. Germany was anathema to these young men, and "little navy" men, Socialists, labor men and Radicals, worse than traitors. How sincere they were in their desire to defend the empire against all

comers! They were of the stuff which makes the most rigid brand of permanent official.

Just before going home to dress for dinner Sir Alfred thought he might write a letter to the *St. Stephen's Gazette* in which he could ask some pertinent questions about the harbor at the Orkneys. He was a great letter writer; usually he signed his letters. But this he thought he would not sign. Clinton's exposé of the members of the armament group was too recent. After his bath he called his secretary, and while dressing he dictated a few lines on the subject, enclosed it with a private note to the editor and posted it.

The rest of the evening was spent in eating and talking, drinking and smoking. The dinner for eight was a great success, interrupted only once by a division on swine fever. Sir Alfred voted for the Government because the speech of the member for Sportshire revealed the incompetence of the minister for agriculture.

CHAPTER VI

COUNT Herbert Von Holst was the son of Elizabeth Martindale, the daughter of the famous Lady Martindale who was a close friend of the old queen. His father when a young man was attached to the Germany Embassy in London. When he inherited the family estates in Thuringia, he returned to England, and after a sojourn there of three years he married Elizabeth. Her children were brought up in Germany until they were old enough to go to English public schools. Herbert, the eldest, finished his university career in England, though he found time for his course of service in the German army. All his tastes were thoroughly English: hunting, shooting, yachting, golfing and racing. He spoke English without an accent. He was a favorite in all official circles. He was rich, very rich. His town house in Mayfair Square was a fine establishment, and his hunting-box, Wilmslow Lodge, was one of the best equipped in the shires.

Surely no friendship ever was so true as that of Von Holst and Edward Horton-Birkett. Before Edward became engaged to Clarice they were called "the inseparables." Edward's regimental duties had always left him plenty of time to be in and about London. Lady Horton-Birkett called them the "old cronies"; indeed, Edward never got on with his brothers so well as he did with Von Holst. Crowington was like a second home to the young German

nobleman, and through the friendship of the young men Von Holst's mother—my adorable mother, he called her—came to regard Lady Horton-Birkett as a kind sister. When she was in England for the coronation she spent some weeks at Crowington and got to know its family very well. Evelyn Mary was then sixteen years old, a beautiful girl, a Willis from top to toe. Von Holst's mother was quick to notice the predilection of her son for that charming maid. The new golf links had just been opened at Press Heath. There day after day Count Herbert played during that hot summer two rounds a day with Evelyn. She was then an exceptionally good player. In the hunting field, having almost grown up in the saddle, she could give him a lead anywhere over the county.

Sir Alfred paid little or no attention to the matings of his family, that was something he left entirely to his wife. But he did consider their financial future. So when he went to Germany with the Better Relations Committee in 1910, he induced Count Herbert's father to take a place on the board of directors of the German firm of the Haigh Shell and Bullet Company. Therefore, the families were united industrially and financially. When the plant was put down in Austria, an extension of the German branch of the firm, old Von Holst used his influence with the Government and joined that board of directors. Sir Alfred often stayed with the old gentleman when he visited Germany, but being a plain British business man, the festivities arranged by his host were lost on him. Great dramatic and operatic performances left him cold, and the artistic guests who assembled at the great house in Berlin failed to draw from Sir

Alfred any particular interest in music, pictures and literature. Though they spoke English, many of them fluently, Sir Alfred never seemed to rise to the occasion. To do him credit he was now so well-off, he held so high a position in industry, politics and religion, the meeting of the great ones in society left him unmoved. He felt he could be made a peer almost any time he wished.

At Whitsuntide Sir Alfred had been unable to take a holiday; he was then too busy floating the Oporto Company. He should have gone to the Continent to see how the Russian, Austrian and German branches of the firm were "getting on"—just to see the experts connected with the plants in those countries and learn the latest news about the growth of peace budgets. In the Commons there were only a few unimportant bills to be dealt with—none he was particularly interested in—so he made up his mind to take a flying trip to Russia, through Germany, and return by Vienna. In Germany he spent only a day with the manager of that branch and then hastened on to Petersburg. When he left that city he was sorely depressed. Just before he departed he took lunch with one of his Russian directors, a man in the know, and from him he learned there was going to be "a devil of a row over that Serajevo murder." The Russian told him pointedly that it was going to be very complicated business, and the treaty obligations of the various first-class Powers were likely "to draw in a deuce of a lot of countries." Poor Sir Alfred, his journey to Vienna was not a cheerful one. Indeed he made up his mind several times to alter his plans, cut the visit to Austria out and rush

back to England. But the business instinct ruled strongly in him and he carried out his plan. In Vienna his worst fears were confirmed. There they told him that a row could not be very well averted. To his amazement when he reached England no one seemed to have the faintest conception of what was going on on the Continent. The House was in session when he got back, and Ireland seemed to be the chief topic of conversation. He thought of calling a meeting of the directors of the company, but the absence of war feeling at home put him off, then after a week-end down at Crowington he put the ugly rumors of Petersburg and Vienna out of his mind. When he got to the House on Monday, July twenty-seventh, the foreign secretary was questioned about the Servian affair, but from his reply there seemed to be no reason for alarm. Servia was a long way off. True, the Russian and Austrian interests in his business were affected, but the threatened storm might blow over.

He stuck closely to the House of Commons all that week; his anxiety deepened from day to day, and when the House rose on Friday, July thirty-first, he had not the heart to go to Crowington for the week-end.

The Horton-Birkett family during the last week in July were very busily engaged, and one of the strangest things in that anxious week was the utter remoteness of Sir Alfred from the rest of his people. Edward John had received his marching orders on Wednesday, the twenty-ninth. His regiment was to entrain for a south coast seaport next morning. Clarice at Clungford received a telegram telling her to

leave by the next train and meet Edward at Euston Station. There he met her on the platform. They had dinner at the hotel, and she saw him off at Waterloo by a late train.

"Don't think it'll be much, old girl," he said. "Don't look so glum. A bit startling, I know, to call you up to town like this. But you never know, you know. Plans may be put off for a bit. Damned if I know what they're up to."

She did not lose her nerve, but when he spoke of their plans being disarranged, she felt a bit teary. Still she was her father's daughter, and she kept saying to herself, "Keep a stiff upper lip," her father's old phrase. It was the uncertainty, the mystery, which puzzled her and made her feel sick. When the undemonstrative Edward took her in his arms, the moment before the train began to move, she felt as if she would scream out, "Don't go until they tell you what it's about." Her father had always known when he was ordered off to fight what it was about. Her father always knew pretty nearly where the fight would take place, and the enemy he would be called upon to attack. A thousand thoughts came rushing into her mind. She clenched her hands, and stood riveted to the spot as the train moved away. There she stood and watched the red tail light on the guard's van until it passed out of sight. How she got back to the Euston Hotel she could not say. Whether she walked or rode she did not know when she woke up next morning. The journey back to Clungford was a heart-breaking business.

"Theirs not to reason why." The phrase invaded her mind and took possession of it. It thumped in her

brain, repeated and seemed to keep time with the train as it jolted over the rail joints. "Theirs not to reason why." Suddenly she thought it was the most senseless phrase she ever heard. Was the soldier's the only calling that must not reason why? She pondered the question for an hour without avail. The more she thought of it the more confused her mind became. Would they obey if they really knew what it was all about? Was there danger in reason? Danger to whom? Was an army a collection of reasonless beings? Impossible! Her father was a soldier and he was certainly a level-headed man. Still she could not get the stupid phrase out of her mind; it stuck there for many days and made her very unhappy.

Von Holst had spent some happy weeks yachting on the west coast of Scotland. When the yacht put into Campbelton on Thursday, the thirtieth, Von Holst had not seen a newspaper for a week, nor had he received any letters for ten days. He and his friends went ashore to have a day's golf on the famous links. At the club house he picked up a newspaper two days old and the news from abroad was so serious he was profoundly shocked. He was so alarmed he asked his friends to give up the idea of golfing and take him at once to the nearest port on the mainland. It was late in the afternoon when he telegraphed to his secretary in London to leave with all correspondence and meet him at Wilmslow Lodge that night or early the next morning. He sent two telegrams to Evelyn; one to her London address, the other to Crowington. After some work on a railway

guide he found that he could get to Crewe on the main line, thirty miles from Wilmslow Lodge, at two o'clock in the morning. He telegraphed to the bailiff at Wilmslow to see that his motor met the train at Crewe.

Like a man lost in a strange country with night coming on, he wandered about the streets near the railway station. He bought all the evening editions of the newspapers, glanced at the latest news, every startling line sending a shaft of despair into his soul. What was it about? Why on earth should the murder of the archduke set all the nations at one another's throats? Nobody went to war when the Servians killed their king and queen. And what on earth had Britain got to do with the affair? Why were the streets of Glasgow filled with soldiers marching with full kit? The train was late in starting and by the time it reached Carlisle it was nearly an hour late. He telegraphed to the station master at Crewe to let his chauffeur know that he was to wait until he arrived.

It was nearly three o'clock when the motor started with him for Wilmslow Lodge. Twice on the road the car had to pull up to let detachments of soldiers and transport wagons pass. Going up Combermere Hill into the clear still night with the heavens drooping heavy with stars, Von Holst's eyes took in the lovely cool mystery straight ahead where the ribbon-like strip of limestone road seemed to lose itself in the sparkling sky. If he could only go on higher and higher, swifter and swifter, right into the bosom of the deep blue ocean of twinkling worlds, and there find Evelyn, alone, waiting, ready for him, the world

called Earth might slip from its place and go crashing through Eternity for all he cared. On him fell a weariness that crushed him as the car shot over the brow and raced down toward the lights of Whitchurch. A haze lay in the bottom where the canal passed round the town. Ten miles more, and then Wilmslow, and Evelyn. Would she be there waiting for him?

Dawn sprang up like a frightened doe and sped across the Staffordshire Hills. A chill breeze blew over the heath as the car flashed out of the warm lane of high hedges and big trees. Von Holst drew up a rug, and pulled his cap down. Only a few miles more and he would be at Wilmslow.

The gate was open, and lights burning in the dining-room. His secretary ran out to meet him.

"Miss Evelyn——?"

"In the dining-room, Count."

He left her for a few minutes to see what his secretary had brought from town. Yes, it was there. It was the first message handed to him. As he sat and gazed at the summons he seemed to shirk and shrivel up. His arms lay inert in his lap, his head and shoulders bowed lower and lower. The message from his father, to return at once, was sharp and terse. There was no mistaking the nature of the order. Nothing was said about the army or war. No, it was not necessary.

He went back to her. He closed the door and leaned heavily against it. Evelyn helped him to a stiff brandy and soda and got him to a chair.

"I know, old chap," she whispered. "It's pretty hard, isn't it? Edward went away, God knows where,

yesterday. Clarice sent me a line about it. What the devils are up to beats me."

"Ed gone?" he said. "Ed gone? Where?"

"He doesn't know."

They were silent for some time. She nestled at his feet, her head on his knees.

"I saw dad this afternoon, just before I came down, at the House," she said, looking at the ferns in the fireplace. "What do you think he said?"

"What?"

Eagerly he asked for any bit of hope.

"I was a lucky girl."

"Lucky! Why lucky?"

"Lucky I hadn't married you."

He was silent trying to guess the meaning.

"Don't you see? I'd be German."

"German," he echoed.

"Yes. If I'd married you." She looked at him with eyes full of yearning.

"I never thought of that," he cried in alarm. "Oh, God, Cricket, what shall we do?"

"Hush, hush, don't, Herbert."

She saw the look of horror in his eyes and fiercely she threw her arms about him. She clutched him and pressed his face to her breast as if she would hide him from the terror gathering about them.

"I'll not let you go. You're mine. I'll not let you go. You belong to me," she murmured with deep conviction, certainty in her tone.

She raised his head and kissed him over and over again. Kisses full of fire.

He rose and put her away firmly, gently. She remained on her knees and watched him go to the

far end of the room where strange shadows lay. They stared at each other for some time. His eyes shone strangely, she thought, out of the darkened corner where he stood. She spread out her arms suppliantly, but he did not move. Then she threw herself down on the rug and cried, "What a rotten game it is!"

After a while she told him the fleet sailed from Weymouth on Monday, and men "in the know" said we were in it. Her father had heard Britain could not keep out if Russia and Austria began. For Russia would drag France in, France would drag Britain in, and Austria would drag Germany in. She mentioned the names of several army men who had said good-by to their sweethearts. Her dad was "rotten gloomy" about it all.

"So we are to fight against one another?" he muttered. "We are to go out and kill our friends—French friends, Russian friends, British friends? Why? What for?"

"What for? Well, old chap, nobody knows. It's the new way of doing business. When do you leave?"

"By the first train."

"Nine fifty, eh?" She glanced at the clock. "Five hours yet. I supposed it's so long since you served in the army, you had forgotten all about it. Queer, isn't it? And you're as British as anything I ever saw."

"Mother, you know."

"Dear old Adorable. Her heart will break over this. Well, may God have no mercy on the crowd that's brought this about."

She rose and stood erect. Her hair fell down about her. He had unconsciously loosened the hair-pins.

"Don't you agree? Herbert! Whether German, British, Austrian, French, or Russian!"

"Yes, I agree. It's awful to know nothing! It's maddening."

"Five hours. That's all. And I am lucky——" She broke off suddenly.

"Don't, Evelyn, my——" He went to her.

"Herbert, I disliked my mealy-mouthed father when I left him yesterday."

She rambled for some time from one subject to another, giving him bits of information she had learned in town.

"I wonder if the old queen was German after she married Prince Albert? Funny. Herbert, take me with you," she said suddenly, as she took hold of his arm and put it around her.

"Oh, if I could—if I dare! Don't, Cricket!"

"Why! You must go, mustn't you?"

"Must? Of course."

"Couldn't you take me to Adorable? She's English!" She looked into his eyes. "Or is she German? Which?"

"German, Cricket. She married a German."

"Well, if they can make a German of Adorable they can make me one."

"Sweetheart, you don't know what you ask. There's going to be war—France and Russia will be against us—and England, too, perhaps. Here you will be safe. This is an island. No, you must stay here. But, you'll wait, Cricket. You'll be ready when I come back?"

She shook her head slowly from side to side as he spoke.

"No, no, I am not going to wait."

"Cricket!"

"I mean it. I mean it absolutely. I am going to be your wife, Herbert. Wait." She put her hand over his lips. "I thought it all over in the train, motoring here from Minsterley, here, for hours before you came. It's not any use arguing with me. If governments can do desperate things—why shouldn't we——"

He took her hand away from his mouth and pressed it against his head.

"But, darling, I must leave by the first train——"

"I know."

"Wouldn't I give my soul—everything in this world—to marry you?"

"Yes. And you will."

"When it is over."

"To-night."

"Evelyn!"

There was no mistaking her meaning. Her face shone full on him, her firm lips, her wide open eyes, told him clearly she was firmly resolved to give herself.

"If marriage to you in time of peace would make me German in time of war, then let us dispense with ceremony. I am what I am, and nothing can make us enemies. We put off our wedding until Ed and Clarice had theirs. Now when you go I want to know I am your wife."

Her words were those of a girl, but her poise was that of a woman fighting for all she loved in the world.

"Let us defy the whole rotten system," she whispered, and flung herself full upon him.

They went up to town by the nine fifty. Von Holst had reserved a compartment. The morning was so beautifully clear and warm it seemed like blasphemy to think of war.

"You have made it a million times harder, Cricket."

"No, no. It is as it should be. Now I can never be any one else's. That's all that matters," she muttered passionately.

They went to Mayfair Square. She would not listen to his suggestion about a special license and a registrar. He said he would put off going until the last moment, but she was obdurate. He left Liverpool Street that evening, and when the train had passed out of sight she got into his car and went to Horton House to pack. In the hall she met her father.

"Well, Cricket," he exclaimed, "where have you been?"

"Seeing Herbert off."

"Oh! Has he gone? Ordered back, eh?"

"Yes, he's gone, dad."

"Poor Cricket, cheer up. Let's hope for better days. Are you very disappointed?"

"No, not very——"

She looked him up and down, slowly, with deep sarcasm in her eyes.

"Good. I'm glad to hear that. Perhaps it's just as well you didn't marry——"

"Marry," she snapped. "We're married all I want to be."

He disliked enigmatic phrases. But her attitude roused his curiosity.

"Not married enough to be German, but married enough to be his," she said, as she left him.

He watched her go up-stairs until the last glimpse of her heel disappeared.

"Very strange," he muttered, as he got into his car.

It was Black Friday. The House rose about five o'clock for the week-end. Sir Alfred made his way to the Hotel Cosmopolis where he was to take the chair at the dinner given by the Turkestan Missionary Society. As he sat in the car he pondered Evelyn's cryptic sentences, but could make no sense of them. He tapped his pocket to make sure the notes of his speech were there. Suddenly he wondered where his wife was—at Crowington or—he remembered. She had gone to York with Harold to the Church Conference. And Robert—where was he? Of course, in Ireland. At the Curragh. Would he have to go? Perhaps not. Ireland was unsettled. Fred was still at Oxford. So he turned them over in his mind just as he gave a mental tick to his engagements when starting off for a busy day. There was, however, one he had not ticked. He took his cigar from his mouth with a sharp movement and sat up straight. Ellen! He had forgotten Ellen. In Germany. Dear, dear, dear. That was embarrassing. What on earth was she doing there? To be in Germany—of all places! Silly girl. Would she know enough to get away in time? The car was passing down Cockspur Street. He popped his head out and told the chauffeur to call at Charing Cross telegraph office.

He wrote a carefully worded message to Ellen, telling her to return at once, and addressed it to her lodgings in Dresden.

"Can't tell when this will go, sir," the clerk said.

"What do you mean?"

"Transmission is very slow—getting slower every hour. All wires are blocked."

"Good gracious! Really. You surprise me. I am a member—Sir Alfred Horton-Birkett—"

"Yes, Sir Alfred, I recognized you."

"Well, that is to my daughter."

"I'll do the best I can, Sir Alfred."

The dinner was heavy and the company stodgy. No one seemed to be able to think of the work in Turkestan. Sir Alfred's speech was dull—he felt it was out of place. The company parted at ten o'clock, and all were glad to reach the streets where they could read "extras."

When he reached home a telegram from the manager of the London office was on his desk. He opened it.

"Headquarters orders necessitate day and night work. Working overtime to-night. Calling to-morrow at nine to see you."

CHAPTER VII

HE asked for Evelyn when he reached his house and learned that she had gone to Sportshire. Her maid said Miss Evelyn had left word for all messages to be sent to Wilmslow Lodge.

All his people were away. He was alone in the great house with the servants. No, he did not care for any supper, only a whisky and soda. He told the butler he would not require him any more. Past the house ran a boy shrieking, "Extra, extra special edition." The butler moved so slowly, Sir Alfred rushed impatiently past him and flung the front door open. He stood on the top of the steps shouting, "Boy, boy, boy." In the stop press column he read a message from Paris stating that a great crowd of fifty thousand persons assembled in Berlin before the Imperial Palace. The emperor appeared at the window, and said to the crowd. "This is a dark hour for Germany. The sword is being forced into her hands." He threw his cigar away and wandered aimlessly through the large rooms. How desolate, how empty, how cheerless everything looked. A heavy shower of rain fell and the sound of it sent a shiver through him. Wearily, heavily, he went upstairs to bed.

His room on the southwest corner of the house overlooked a garden fronting on Park Lane. He propped himself up in bed and tried to read from the Psalms. He dozed off in an awkward position.

He lay there sweating profusely for some time. The crash of a heavy motor-car bounding over a rut in the road woke him with a terrifying start. When his mind was clear he caught the sound of harsh grating clutches of motors as the traffic turned the corner to rush up toward Paddington. As he listened it seemed to him that the night was humming with the dreadful discordances of feverish, bustling activity. The sounds were near, and then, like a falling cadence of some *agitato fortissimo*, the wailing, moaning, creaking wagons with their sounds died away into the dull throbbings of the night. He arranged his pillows and again composed himself for sleep, but he was never so wide awake in bed. He wished his wife was near, she was so calm, so certain about things. While his mind dwelt on her he became conscious of the tramp and slither of troops passing the house. How long had that been going on, he wondered. Yes, they were at the corner in Park Lane. Guns, too; he could hear the clank and rattle of the loose metal wheels. *Schr-tramp, schr-tramp, schr-tramp*, the boys were marching. There was something sinister in that sound of dragging heels on the gritty pavement. He began to loathe the noise. He felt as if they were marching into his soul. He could not lie there and listen to it, he could not endure the torture of that sound. He tumbled out of bed and paced up and down the room. "Halt!" an officer cried. The command was taken up all down the lines. Then the scamper of a prancing horse, its chains rattling, and the clanking of a saber became the dominant note. Then all was silence for a moment until his ears caught again the dull roar

of the traffic in the streets beyond. So he spent the night, and when morning came he was a sad and wearied wreck.

After a very light breakfast he thought he would like to go to church. He had lost count of the days and thought it was Sunday. Strangely enough he had forgotten to look for the morning's newspapers. He had got out of bed on the wrong side. Habit was deserting him. He turned and saw them all laid in perfect order upon the little table near his chair. Into his mind there crept the thought as he glanced at the journals that most of the editors of Europe seemed to be bent on having war. Yet the London party prints gave no indication of danger to Britain. Was he going to be left alone all the weary week-end in London? After the interview with his business manager who was full of nervous energy, he feared the worst. The orders received from the Government left no doubt in his mind that Britain was committed to obligations of war. And yet no one had even suggested what was the *casus belli*. He went to a Turkish bath and spent the morning there, and afterward he walked over to the club for lunch, not the club on the Embankment, but to that dull place in Pall Mall, the charnel house of all Liberal ideas. Still, he thought he might find there, among the notabilities of torified Liberals, some men who would have some accurate information as to Britain's true position. The first man he ran into was his old friend, Lord Parkgate.

"Ah, Birkett, that you?" Parkgate squeaked. "What did I tell you?"

Sir Alfred would rather have met the devil.

"Can you tell me whether we are so heavily armed that war is an impossibility?" his lordship asked, with sarcastic stress on each word.

"So you think war can not be averted?" Sir Alfred asked in reply.

"Think it can not be averted! I'm damn sure it can not be averted, and so are you, Birkett—I can see that by the look of you. All my lads received their orders days ago. And I haven't slept a con-founded wink since Wednesday night. From midnight till five in the morning all the armies in creation seemed to have passed under my bedroom window. Well, all I hope is that you chaps have made sure of the safety of the empire."

He turned on his heel, shrugged his shoulders, stamped his stick on the pavement and passed across the hall to the dining-room. Sir Alfred changed his mind and decided to go to the French café at the Savoy for lunch. There, certainly there would be some brightness and no Parkgates.

During the afternoon he looked in at Downing Street and at the Foreign Office. He tried to get a telegram through the Foreign Office to Ellen. Strange how she seemed to occupy his mind. The Foreign Office people told him that they had piles of messages they were trying to get through for the privileged ones. When he got back into Whitehall, he stood on the corner and did not know whether to turn to the left, or the right, or go straight across the street. He stood there without purpose for several minutes. He didn't see a soul he knew. Men in khaki were rushing about with kit bags and rifles. Three or four little boys stood around him shouting

"Extra" into the tails of his frock coat. A motor-bus passed and his eye caught the advertisement of a play, *The Great Adventure*. He hailed a taxi and was driven to the Kingsway Theater. He had seen the play before, but he bought a stall and took his seat. Anything was better than roaming about the streets or going back to his empty lonely house. After a few scenes he was delighted to find that the acting of Mr. Ainley and Miss Wynne absorbed his mind. Later over a cup of tea at the Holborn he pondered what he could do with himself that evening. He glanced down the advertisement column of theaters and decided to go to the Haymarket to see *Driven*. It was Saturday. He would not leave anything to chance, so he called up the box office and telephoned for a seat to be reserved. After the first act he left the theater, not because the play was uninteresting, but because he was not in the mood.

That night the club on the Embankment was crowded. Politicians, novelists, cabinet ministers, Civil Service men, journalists, doctors, nationalists, editors, etc., the motley crowd of liberal political thought of London and the provinces. He had not been there long before he was asked to join a Neutrality League. Though he could not accede to that request, he felt he would have given all he possessed to avert war. To find all his great notions of an armed peace crumbling to dust filled him with despair. To his amazement he found a large number of the members extremely anti-German and ready for war. The atmosphere of the club depressed him and reluctantly, when he got out, he turned his steps toward Horton House.

When he drew near it he surveyed the pile and thought of his marvelous success in commerce. "Give me a chance to rise," he had said so often to his parents when he was a lad, and many a time his mother had said to him, "Alfred, be humble." His parents were long dead, but he had not forgotten them. Where would he be to-day if he had taken their advice and gone into the ministry of Christ? Maybe he would have a chapel in some small country town with only one hundred and fifty pounds a year, a very large family and a small manse. He shook himself to escape from those thoughts, and passed across the street to his front door.

It was after eleven when his wife arrived and found him dozing in the unread library. The news they had received at York that morning was so alarming that she lost interest in the proceedings of the conference and came up to town. He awoke with a start. His gladness on seeing her surprised her a little. They were a well-matched couple and had passed a fairly smooth married life. Their interests of course ran not always in the same channel. His great business affairs, and political and religious undertakings took him away from her a good deal. But she was very happy, and never found time hang heavily on her hands. Alfred did not care much for society, and her bent was altogether in that direction. She was proud of her children; they had done tremendously well. They weren't snobs, she thanked heaven.

"How is Harold?" he asked.

"Very fit. His sermon yesterday was quite a success. The archdeacon told me he had a great fu-

ture in the church. But I'm afraid Harold will be always a very worldly parson. You know, dad, I don't like that crowd in Mifsterley he's got in with. They are—well, rather fast, and such a gossiping set of people."

"I know 'em," he added. "I told you, Evie," he added again. "That archdeacon!" He shook his head. "My dear, I don't want to say anything about your church. You were born in it, and it can't be helped. But hang me, some ov'em do get on my nerves. You see! They'll make a proper fool of Harold yet. See if they don't."

His wife sighed wearily.

"He may improve," she muttered. "He's young, you know. You must be patient, dad. Still I do wish he were—somewhere else—somewhere—where he could be looked after, guided by a really good man."

"He seems to think of nothing but sport and pre-ferment at present. This job's too easy, Evie. And that archdeacon!"

"I've told him the archdeacon has no influence at all, but Harold thinks he has."

"Stuff and nonsense!" Sir Alfred scoffed. "Has he let the archdeacon have any money?"

"I don't know," she said. "But, dear me, where's Evelyn? Gone to bed?"

"Evelyn. Oh—er—she's gone to Wilmslow——"

"Wilmslow. Where's Herbert?"

"He's er—ordered back to Germany. Went last night."

"What's Evelyn doing at Wilmslow?"

"I can't make out."

"The poor child must be fearfully upset. Did you see Ed before he went away?"

"No, but I had a word with him over the phone."

"Poor Ed, he sent me a note. He thought I was at Crowington. Why did they send him off in such a hurry?"

"They're sending everybody off in a hurry."

"Have you heard from Robert?"

"No. I s'pose he's at the Curragh. Fred's at Oxford. But I'm a bit nervous about Ellen. Don't like her being in Germany."

"Don't worry, dear," she said, laying her hand tenderly on his big round shoulders. "Ellen knows how to look after herself."

"Yes, I know. Great girl, Ellen! But I wish I had looked in on her at Dresden when I was on my way to Vienna a week ago."

They brought some food in, and her maid handed her a large packet of letters. There was one from Evelyn. It came in by the last post.

"Wilmslow Lodge.

"August 1st, 1914.

"Dear Mater:

"I'm here. Got here very late last night from Minsterley. Herbert went away yesterday evening. I saw him off. Couldn't let him go without making sure that we were tied up forever. There was no time to get married. I don't know whether I am happy or heart-broken—a good bit of both. Now, for heaven's sake don't make a fuss. I am going to stay here, near Clarice who is with me now. She is bucking up tremendously. Top hole in a driving gale. Damn war and everybody that sends fellows to their death.

"Cricket."

It took them some time to grasp the meaning of it all. Cricket was the baby and their idol. They scarcely realized that she had grown up.

"She doesn't mean it, does she?" There was a tremor in his voice. His lower lip fell, and he hid his eyes from his wife.

"They were deeply attached," she said. "I never saw two people so much in love. Theirs was love. I must go down to her to-morrow."

"Not to-morrow, dear," he pleaded. "Wait at any rate until Monday. Nothing can be done, I suppose."

"No, nothing, but I shall go to-morrow. I must see her. I wonder why she did it. It seems so strange. And Herbert. There's some mystery about it. When did you see her last?"

"Last night."

"Didn't she say anything then?"

"Yes. What was it?"

Wearily he rested his head on his arm and tried to remember what Evelyn said to him.

"Something about not married enough to be German but married enough to be his wife."

He looked rather sheepishly at his wife.

"Not enough to be German?" she said slowly.

"Yes. That was it, I think."

It began to dawn on Sir Alfred that Evelyn perhaps had been nettled by his remark about her being lucky not to have married Herbert. A discomforting notion infected him that his silly reference to the nationality of her lover had put the idea into her head to flout convention.

"Some silly person evidently has said quite the

wrong thing to her," his wife observed. "She is just the kind of girl to resent anything of that kind. Besides, in Herbert's case it is too utterly foolish for words. The son of Elizabeth Martindale, an English public-school boy, one of our best known university men, and Ed's dearest friend. German! The idea."

They sank into themselves, and a strange silence fell upon them. Each tried to solve the puzzle in Evelyn's letter. Vaguely they knew what had happened. Alfred was, however, too conscious of his own blunder to give way to anger. A tear slipped down his nose, and trickled along one of the heavy lines in parenthesis over his mouth. He tasted the salty drop, and brushed his lips with the back of his hand.

"Awful," he muttered.

His wife sighed wearily and poked a hairpin out of sight.

"We've let her have her own way far too much," she said.

They were stunned. The news coming after so many startling events found them without the energy for demonstrative grief.

Sir Alfred lay awake most of the night thinking of Evelyn down there at Wilmslow, and wondering what she thought of him. The noises from the street of tramping troops and rushing lorries were nerve-racking enough. The next morning after breakfast he went with his wife to Euston and saw her off by the ten o'clock train. Returning to his house, his motor had to pull up to let a regiment pass down Oxford Street. After watching the troops

for some time he was struck by their strange demeanor. They were whistling *Tipperary*. The tune sounded gay enough, but the faces of the men were full of anxiety. The morning was hot, and their kits very heavy. Heavily they trudged along, going God knows where. It reminded him of one night during the railway strike when he saw some companies of regulars march down Euston Road to take charge of the great railway station. He thought then that he had never seen a body of men look so pale and sick. They certainly did not like the business on which they were bent. The memory of their ghastly faces urged him, in the debate on the use of military in time of strike, to rise and tell the House what he had seen, and beg the Government to find some other way of trying to preserve order in time of industrial ferment.

He went to chapel. Not one of the fashionable places where he would be in the midst of numbers of people who would know him, he went to a chapel in a poor district on the south side of the river where the son of an old friend of his was trying to keep a congregation together, and to grapple with the religious degeneracy in the neighborhood. The preacher took a text from Ecclesiastes, "Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good." When the service was over he made his way to the vestry to shake hands with the son of his old friend. And there he found him in conversation with a very old man. The minister recognized him at once and placed a chair for him.

"It is good of you, Sir Alfred, to come over here to see what we're doing."

"No, thank you, I won't sit down. I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed your sermon."

The old man stood off and peered at Sir Alfred. He cocked his head to the left, then to the right, he rubbed his spectacles and readjusted them.

"It is Sir Alfred," he exclaimed. "It is, it is. The Lord be praised."

Sir Alfred looked inquiringly, first at the old man, and then at the minister.

"My grandfather. He's over eighty-five."

"Really, you surprise me," said Sir Alfred, taking the old man's hand.

"Aye, over eighty-five. God has been good. And now He gives me the happiness of speaking to a righteous man. One who may be counted on to send the message of the Prince of Peace to the rulers and the statesmen of Europe. Aye, Sir Alfred, God bless your efforts to keep the nations at peace. Come, let us fall on our knees and ask God to help us."

There was no resisting the old man. The minister and his grandfather knelt down, and the old man began to pray. Sir Alfred for the first time in his life was afflicted with rebellious knees. In a few seconds he suffered acutely. The stuffy vestry, the thundery heat of the morning, the lack of sleep and utter physical weariness, affected him strangely. He felt sick. He did not want to kneel and pray, he wanted to get into the air outside. A feeling of anger at the presumption of the old man came and passed quickly, leaving him disgusted with himself. And when he did kneel at a chair near the door, he stretched out his hand, turned the old brass knob silently, and opened the door to admit some air. Old men's

prayers are long, and repetition breeds repetition. Sir Alfred was so often placed by the old man into the hands of God that the minister was obliged to interject "Amen" in a tone of finality many times. When the prayer did come to an end, Sir Alfred made hurried adieux, and on reaching the street got on top of the first bus going his way.

Lady Horton-Birkett reached Minsterley three hours late. Troop trains retarded the ordinary traffic. When she found there was not a car for hire in the town her disgust knew no bounds. She got on to Crowington by telephone from the chief hotel and asked for her motor to be sent in at once. It was late when she got to Wilmslow Lodge. Evelyn had been over to Clungford with Clarice to have a cup of tea with her.

"Why didn't you go to Crowington?" her mother asked, after many embraces.

"Herbert wanted me to stay here. Don't fuss, mater. I'll stay here. He gave the place to me, but no one was to know about it until we were married. Wilmslow is the marriage settlement."

"But the servants?"

"Never mind, dear. My maid is coming here to-morrow."

The mother fenced skilfully, to learn Evelyn's real position, without much success. All she learned was that her daughter to all intents and purposes had been married. No, there was no ceremony of any kind. They were one, but she was still an Englishwoman. Yes, she and Herbert had stayed there on Thursday morning just as if they were husband and wife.

"It seems to me everything is going to pieces," her mother muttered, so sadly. "Your father looks so old, Evelyn, and he is worried about Ellen. Have you heard from her lately?"

"A fortnight or so ago. Ellen is all right, mater. Don't fuss. If war does break out she'll go to Adorable, I should think. I wrote to her yesterday and told her what a wretched state we're in."

"I wish we were all together. It's awful for a family to be scattered all over the place at a time like this. Ed gone. Robert in Ireland. Ellen in Germany. And Herbert——"

Evelyn had never seen tears in her mother's eyes before. She went to her, and took her in her arms. Evelyn dried her eyes and soothed her.

"Never mind, mater, you'll have to look after me now. I shan't go far away from Wilmslow. You'll wait for Ed, and I'll wait for Herbert. We'll wait down here—you at Crowington and —just here, until the war is over, and they come back to us."

CHAPTER VIII

BENJAMIN TONKS, B. A., was the principal speaker at the open-air demonstration held in Battersea Park on Sunday, August second, to protest against Britain's intervention in a European war. Some hundreds of men and women gathered round the rostrum. The chairman of the meeting was Mr. Nicholas Garside, the Fabian pamphleteer. From his place he could see fathers and mothers reclining on the grass while round about them their children coursed in and out of the family circle playing games. Numbers of wearied creatures lay prone on their backs in the sweltering heat. The object of the meeting, and the attitude of the people beyond the bounds of the meeting, seemed to Mr. Garside poles apart. The wisdom of those about to address the meeting, and the ignorance of those lying about on the grass struck him as being so contradictory that he began to doubt the reason for his alarm. The churches had been called on to preach peace that day, but the comparative few who attended churches of all kinds would carry little or no weight with the Government. The real danger was known only to a couple of score of men. Anyway, now Germany and Russia were at it, what hope was there for Britain?

Ben's speech was the best he ever made, but it was a failure all the same. There was no opposition—none at all. He felt that his audience was sympa-

thetic, but there was no response. Save for a hundred or so hard-headed Radicals near the platform, all he said on foreign policy and armaments was lost. He could not make them see the connection, how the one fostered the other. The same audience would have cheered to the echo any speech Ben could have made on domestic issues. It seemed to him that his hearers cared nothing for foreign policy, or he had failed to convince them of the imminence of war. "You are islanders, and for the most part ignorant of the jeopardy in which you stand. The fleet is to you an impregnable barrier against aggression, but, I warn you, if we go into this war we might suffer terrible defeats and untold hardships though not one foreign soldier set foot on our shores." He brought every rhetorical gun he had into action without rousing them out of their apathy or ignorance. The resolution was passed unanimously, but without enthusiasm. At question time matters were not mended. "Why should we go to war?" "Who are we going to fight?" "Is it not a dodge of the capitalists to frighten us into conscription?" and so on.

Ben and his friends left the park sad and discouraged and made their way to Whitehall. Troops were marching across Westminster Bridge to Waterloo Station. At the corner of Downing Street a crowd of reporters watched the arrival of cabinet ministers going to the second cabinet meeting. Ben had a few words with Rennett of *The Elector*, and learned from him that it was only a question of what excuse was to be made to Parliament. Several ministers had resigned, so it was rumored. He gleaned from his friends making notes that things

were just as bad as they could be. He was taking leave of Rennett when Sir Alfred passed down the street. Suddenly his mind was full of Ellen. He had never spoken to Sir Alfred, but straight across the street he went and stopped him.

"I'm Tonks, Sir Alfred. Benjamin Tonks—from Crowington."

"Oh! Yes, Mr. Tonks, eh? Well?"

"I'm the one who took Ellen home from Minsterley Show years ago," Ben explained, feeling Sir Alfred was so absorbed in other affairs that he did not clearly understand. In a moment Sir Alfred grabbed his hand and shook it.

"I remember," he said. "I heard about it. Of course. Where are you going?"

"I was going to get a cup of tea before attending a meeting at Camden Town——"

"Come with me, do! I haven't had lunch. News so serious. Terrible. Let us jump in a cab."

He hailed a taxi, and they set off for Horton House.

"Let me see. Are you the Tonks that wrote the novel on——"

"Yes."

"I read it. Excellent. Awful, this business, isn't it? I've been trying to get through to my daughter in Dresden."

"Dresden. You mean Ellen. She isn't in Dresden," Ben said, without thinking whether Sir Alfred knew about their friendship.

"Not in Dresden. How do you know?"

"We correspond. She's gone to Starnberg for a ramble in the Austrian Alps."

"Good gracious! Then you've heard lately from her."

"A week—ten days ago," Ben said. "She wrote asking me to forward a book, saying she was just leaving Dresden for a month's holiday."

"Indeed. That's bad. I telegraphed to her to return home at once. So you correspond. Ellen has many literary friends. She's been away from home a long time now. She's very fond of Germany, you know."

During tea conversation turned on foreign policy, but Sir Alfred soon found he had caught a tartar in Ben. Their views touched at no point. Sir Alfred was sure Germany was at the bottom of the whole affair; Ben thought otherwise. Sir Alfred believed in an armed peace; Ben favored non-resistance.

"But if a man comes up and slaps you on the cheek?" Sir Alfred asked.

"In the case of a man I should ask what I had done to offend him."

"Certainly, that would be most proper, most Christian-like, but——"

"Have you ever been struck, Sir Alfred—without provocation?" Ben inquired.

"No, I don't think so."

"Neither have I. It rarely happens."

"But German ambition,——"

"What about Radical ambition? Think of Nationalist ambition in Ireland! That is fierce enough, isn't it? Could you find two ambitions so fiercely opposed as Orange Ulster and Catholic Connaught? In that case no one wants war, and everything will be done to prevent war. Then think of non-con-

formity's ambition to disestablish and disendow the Church. Our domestic quarrels are not beyond settlement without resort to arms, and they are deeper fundamentally than the quarrels of nations. These issues concern individuals who meet every day."

Sir Alfred was caught by the ease and simplicity of Ben's method of presenting his case. He sat forward and listened with all his ears.

"Forgive me if I say there is a fearful lot of ar-rant nonsense written by modern historians on this subject. Now, where is there a clash of ideals and ambitions in the British and the German peoples? Not Governments, mind. I mean the ordinary work-a-day men and women. Do they know anything at all about the quarrel? Not an atom. You know that, Sir Alfred. Why, you are a member of Parliament, and now you don't know why a single regiment has been ordered away."

"Perfectly true, Tonks. That's undeniable."

"But you do know about Ireland. And you certainly know the case for disestablishment. You also know why there is fierce labor unrest all over the kingdom."

"I see your point. Yes. But I can not see how the theory of non-resistance can be put into practise in Europe as things are. Nations can not commit suicide, Tonks."

"No, they go in for murder."

"I agree, once war begins," Sir Alfred said. "You are quite right, it's murder. Another cigarette. Must you really go?"

Ben had risen. It was time for him to be off to his meeting.

"Do come and see me," Sir Alfred said, as he shook his hand. "I have been deeply interested. Let me know where to find you."

He went to the door with him.

"I was just like you when I was your age," Sir Alfred said. He laid his hand on Ben's shoulder and patted it with his fingers. "Our ideas change when we grow old. I've often thought about it, Tonks. When we get into the House, rear big families, carry great industrial responsibilities, the old political zeal seems to fade away. It's strange—very strange. Good-by."

Ben thought of taking a bus to Camden Town, but on consideration he decided to walk; it was such a lovely night. They could begin the meeting without him, and they could turn him on to speak when he got there. The sun was setting, and Hyde Park was in a glow of mellow light. People of fashion glided by in expensive motor-cars. Weary mothers dragged their tired children along the pavement to busses going east. The motley crowd of Marble Arch, on a fine Sunday evening, swayed to and fro; rich and poor, high and low, fashion and rags, pleasure and pain, age and youth, intermixed at the busy corner. Here east rubbed shoulders with west. Ben turned down Oxford Street, and soon became fascinated with the thought of how general was the practise of non-resistance. The shop-girl in her Sunday clothes who submitted to the slavery of the counter; the prostitute who never raised her voice against the economic system which forced her to sell her body; the hungry child who accepted stint as a part of its life; the half-starved men and women,

old and young, who pottered about the streets day and night and never dreamed of taking action against the upholders of privilege. Everywhere, on every hand, Ben saw non-resistance practised until it became a habit by thousands of passers-by. Out of the land of the powerful and rich he passed in a few minutes into the by-ways of penury and filth. He struck across the narrow ways diagonally to Hampstead Road. Drunken women, unkempt children, pale girls, shrunk men, noisy youths, without purpose, hope or delight, thronged the streets. As he went farther north, away from the main thoroughfare, the neighborhood grew worse. The hopelessness of it all depressed him. Reform seemed to be mere trifling with the dead weight of misery. Yet he thought the miserable found some enjoyment—spasmodic, truly—in their life. Some laughed, others sang, and round an organ, in an awful street, scores of children danced merrily. Even some elderly women jigged for a while to the amusement of their men looking on. At a corner near Cobden's statue the Salvation Army dispensed prayer and song with military band accompaniment to a dozen stragglers. Standing aloof, with his hands in his empty pockets, a dirty, ragged, sick-looking man snickered and jeered at the Salvationist praying in strident tones.

"The Lord Jesus Christ is dead, you fool," Ben heard him say.

The hall was packed and uncomfortably hot. He made his way to the platform and was called on immediately by the chairman to speak. His speech took at first a strong line against armaments. Then he went on and dealt with the enormous rise in

prices of foodstuffs. He showed how private pocket patriots were the first to deliver a crushing blow against the poor and needy of their own country. The enemy at home was at war with them before we heard from the Government the name of the enemy abroad. The fleet had sailed—because an Austrian archduke was murdered. Troops were assembling in thousands—because Austria wished to punish Servia. Then he told them what he had seen as he came along to the meeting, and the thoughts which came to him as he passed along the streets. Was there not enough misery in Britain without adding the cost and suffering of war? Was there so little industrial and social evil at home that we could afford to dabble in the diplomatic adventures of Europe? The time would come when the workers and the wretched would rise against the rulers and decide to look after their own affairs.

The audience understood the speech and cheered him enthusiastically when he sat down. He wished he had taken that line in the afternoon at Battersea Park, instead of trying to explain the balance of power and foreign affairs to men who had very little electoral power, seldom a real balance on pay-day, and a notion that the workers of foreign countries were worse off than themselves.

Down in the gay part of London later that night Ben roamed the street to see if there were any Jingo goes abroad. Round about Piccadilly and Leicester Square would be the locality to find them if they were at all exuberant. Some there were, very few, indeed, but just about enough to help the Jingo journals next morning to refer to "great demonstra-

tions" in the streets—about a score or two of excitable young men cheering troops going to the railway station.

How the Commons and the country were swept into the strife in that first week of August was a miracle in tactics more wonderful than any performed in the time of Joshua or Jonah. How Liberal newspapers (and Liberal members for the most part) fell into the trap was one of the most amazing spectacles ever seen in an "enlightened" country.

Sir Alfred was anxious and depressed on Sunday, the second; he was elated and full of fight on Sunday, the ninth. Germany by the violation of the Belgian Treaty had saved him from humiliation. A righteous war meant no qualms of conscience. The protection of small weak countries was the first principle of British policy. The armed peace had been broken by a Power which had been arming for forty years. After Louvain, Malines and Dinant, the wisdom and uprightness of Britain going to war were amply confirmed. Sir Alfred would not have had it otherwise. Before Mons he was convinced Germany had made her warlike preparations solely to smash Christianity, western civilization, and the British Empire. Coal, oil and shell stocks went soaring sky-high. A small business he had started two years earlier which dealt in pots and pans could not supply the demands of the War Office half fast enough. So that the army should not run short he had with patriotic foresight bought all the available stocks of hardware he could get hold of. "Business as usual" was the cry, and many of those en-

gaged in selling merchandise to the army did "the usual" war business, but on a larger scale. An "armed peace" had enriched Sir Alfred; a righteous war gave every indication of showering another fortune upon him. His name figured on all the charity lists for large sums. He was energetic, ubiquitous and indefatigable in industry, generous with his money, and ready with his oratory, and in his determination firm to save Christian Britain from a Godless Prussia. All through September he worked incessantly. He visited every branch of his works and told the men the Christian reason why they were making missiles. The destruction of Rheims Cathedral made him burn with an indignation almost as great as that he suffered as a young man when he was ready to pull any such edifice down to the ground. From round about Crowington he had got together a score of young men to enlist for service abroad, much to the annoyance of some neighboring landlords and many of the farmers. He even tried to persuade Evelyn to let two grooms go from the stables at Wilmslow, but she flatly refused to do any such thing, and told him to be off and not bother her again until the war was over. Poor Sir Alfred forgot in his enthusiasm that Count Herbert was a German.

At Horton House and at Crowington Manor sewing classes were established. Bandages, socks, shirts, woolen helmets, belts, etc., etc., were made in hundreds. Lady Horton-Birkett presided over these gatherings, and planned the work from week to week. Evelyn and Clarice, with the servants, plied needle and thread as busily as if they were qualifying for jobs in

a sweatshop. They gave up all idea of shooting and hunting that season, and only to keep them fit did they indulge in golf twice a week. Ed had written several times from somewhere in France, but Evelyn had received no word from Herbert since August fourth. These two women spent most of their days together. Each morning after a glance at the officer's casualty list in the paper they tabooed all reference to the war.

Robert had gone to the front; he went away toward the end of September. The war pacified Ireland, for the time being, and troops of a Radical Government were spared for bloodshed abroad. About the middle of October, Fred wrote from Oxford to his mother telling her he had enlisted. He was in the ranks, but he hoped dad would use his influence and get a commission for him as soon as possible.

CHAPTER IX

IT WOULD be hard to find two men so different as Captain E. J. Horton-Birkett and Colonel Jawton. They were opposites. It was a pity fate threw them together in the same regiment. Jawton was an accomplished soldier of what was called "the old school"—a martinet. The men loathed him, and yet they admired his courage and skill. The trouble with Jawton was he was born without the sense of consideration for others. He was a slave-driver who did not spare himself. At mess he was an arrogant, intolerant militarist, ignorant of everything that made life worth living. He knew soldiering—and that was about all he knew. Ed and the colonel from the first never really hit it off. Somehow Ed's deliberate methods got on the colonel's nerves. He would curse in his throat at the way Ed spoke, at the way he walked, at the time he took to consider a question. In conversation at mess, Ed would pursue a subject doggedly, turn it inside and out, worry it until it was done for. This habit of his was perhaps the cause of much of Jawton's umbrage. Somehow he got a notion into his bullet-shaped head that Edward took a particular pleasure in showing him up—"setting him right"—before the subalterns. The colonel was a bit of a "spreader" and often talked at random, and many of his statements had to be corrected.

What really happened between Jawton and Ed after their regiment was cut up in that last week of

October may never be known. Some say Jawton for the first time in action got confused. Certainly the smoke, the dust, the blood and the noise were enough to shake the nerves of a cast-iron effigy. Jawton swore his orders were quite clear and that they were not carried out. When the regiment broke it was in among the Germans before the men realized it was to be all bayonet work. All was inextricably confused, and the guns of the British artillery were wiping out scores of Ed's Tommies. Where the Germans sprang from nobody knew. Sergeant-Major Tudor said they popped up "outer 'ell an' all under our bloody eye-brow," and all he saw in the mêlée was Captain Horton-Birkett rushing forward to the place where Major Pomeroy-Fanton fell, to pick him up. Just then Tudor was bayoneted in the shoulder and shot, in the leg. He fainted. Lieutenant Ercall who was crawling back, his foot badly shattered, saw Ed return and pick up Tudor. Ercall noticed Ed fought with his sword in his left hand. But what happened between Jawton and Ed nobody knew. Wild rumors flew about for some days, and there was a feeling among the men that Captain Horton-Birkett was in disgrace, down at the base. Then some one came up the line and said Ed was badly wounded—his right hand smashed and his back and thigh pierced with bullets. He was in hospital. It was thought he would lose his arm.

"'E went abaht it as if 'e was strolling acrost 'Ampstead 'Eath, so 'e did," Tudor told the men in the hospital. "First the major 'e took—carried 'im—like a blessed baby—back a good bit. Then back 'e comes after me. 'E was done up proper, but I

'ung on to 'im and 'opped it back. 'E's a bloody cucumber, 'e is."

When Ed was well enough to leave the base hospital he was transferred to one at the port. He had lost the thumb and first finger of his right hand, and some bits of his back and thigh. But he never said a word to any one about his interview with Jawton. News, however, from the battle-field travels faster than general's despatches, and a week or two after "something went wrong" with Ed's regiment, it was whispered about the clubs in London that Horton-Birkett was in disgrace.

Sir Alfred overheard a conversation at his club and learned that his son was in trouble. What he heard made him feel so sick he had to leave the table where he was dining and get out into the air. The gossips did not know he was the father of the man whose conduct they were discussing. He wanted to know more about it, but he could not muster sufficient courage to go back and ask the men who sat at the next table for the whole story. He, however, went over the next day to the hospital in France. Ed was mending, but his father could not drag a word from him about the cause of his disgrace. All he learned from Ed was that in the *mêlée* he came face to face with Herbert.

"Don't ask any more, please, dad," he said. "The doctor says I'll be here for about three weeks. Tell Clarice not to worry about me. I shall be all right soon."

When Sir Alfred got back to London he found his wife had received a letter from Fred who had heard bad news of Ed, and wanted to know what it was

all about. The rumor spread quickly and soon found its way down to Lady Clungford. She kept it away from Clarice as long as possible. But rumor like water will find a hole somewhere. A few days later she and her mother were at breakfast when Clarice dropped a letter she was reading and burst into tears. The letter was from her friend, Lady Cottam, in London. It was short:—

“Belslow Square.

“Clarice, my love, I don’t believe a word of it: Ed is not the man to funk anything.

“This abominable story about Jawton’s orders being disobeyed is scouted by all the men who know Ed. My husband says it is absurd on the face of it. If Ed was told to advance at five and funk it why should he advance at five-thirty when there was livid hell raging, by all accounts? Buck up, dearie, and laugh at it.

“Your old pal,

“Nance.

“P. S. Hubby says Jawton had to make some excuse for the smash-up of the regiment. It’s always the way—the sins of the big duffers, etc.”

Clarice was all for starting off, there and then, for France. She knew he was wounded, but he had telegraphed “nothing serious,” and Sir Alfred had written saying Ed would be home in a week or two. Since she saw his name in a casualty list she could not rest; sewing, reading, writing in her diary were tried furtively. She could not fix her mind on any occupation for long. She would set out to walk over to Wilmslow and turn back suddenly, fearing a telegram might come in her absence. Evelyn went over to Clungford every day to see her. Lady Horton-Birkett deserted the sewing circle in London and

went down to Crowington to be near Clarice. The two mothers, Ed's and Clarice's, schemed and planned how they should keep her quiet and get her interested in some work, but without avail. It was hard enough for them before Clarice heard from Lady Cottam; it was a sad business after to see her wandering about the grounds, keeping out of their way, dreading to speak to any one. Even Evelyn failed to comfort her.

"I do wish Ed were here," Lady Clungford sighed. "She will be down with a serious illness if this goes on much longer."

"If we only knew why Ed is in disgrace," Evelyn gasped. "It is these horrible rumors which are so hard to bear. Everybody seems to hear them, nobody seems to believe them, and there's no getting to the bottom of them. Dad says Ed is as silent as a sphinx about it. You may be sure he won't say much—it's Ed's dogged way. If there was only some one with grit enough to squeeze the truth out of Jawton's throat I'd be happy, but there's no one. Superior officer, for the army's sake, discipline, you know—and all that—is dead against us."

"Ed's a scapegoat," Lady Clungford said. "That's my opinion, Cricket."

"But surely they will give him a chance to clear himself," his mother put in anxiously.

"They won't," Lady Clungford snapped. "Don't you believe it, Evie. When you know as much about the army as I do, you'll know the little 'uns must bear the sins of the big 'uns. Did they give Tommy Biggs a chance to clear himself? Suppose you kick up a row about it as his people did? What's the good? Where's Tommy now? Eating his heart out

in the West Indies. Justice must not clash with discipline."

Day after day these women met and discussed the matter without making headway. The rumor was like an epidemic, it persisted in appearing in the most unexpected quarters, without revealing how contagion was carried from place to place. The more these women discussed it, the worse it grew, the more indignant they became, and the greater their impotence to probe the matter. They were like sleepers struggling to escape out of a terrible nightmare.

It was late in November when Ed reached Crowington. His train arrived at Minsterley too late for the last connection up the branch line. Sir Alfred had telegraphed to his wife to motor in and fetch him home. She and Clarice went to meet him. It was raining; a chilly dreary night.

The train moved slowly along the platform: the women looked eagerly into the first-class carriages for a glimpse of the wounded man. The station, always badly lighted, was heavy with damp murk and clouds of smoke and steam. A Tommy, with his head bandaged, carrying his sack, stepped down to the platform and fell into the arms of an old woman.

"Eh, lad, tha's 'ome, thank God," she cried over him. "Albert 'Enry! Albert 'Enry! God's mercy!"

"Get 'old o' this, mother, an' 'ush th' whimperin'," he said, giving her the sack. "Captain's on th' train. I must give a 'and."

He opened the door of a first-class carriage and

sprang into the compartment. The lamp was shaded and the blinds were drawn. He called a porter.

"Give us a 'and matey, in 'ere."

Clarice and Lady Horton-Birkett had passed down the platform, their anxiety increasing with every step they took, until they reached the engine. With hasty steps they returned and came to the compartment into which the porter had jumped at the request of the wounded Tommy. The women stood holding each other's hands, mute; dread rooted them to the spot. Their eyes fastened on the open door saw only the backs of the porter and the Tommy bending over the seat inside.

"'E's orl right when 'e's on 'is pins. Gently," they heard the Tommy say.

Slowly Ed rose, supported by the men, and stood up under the lamp. They helped him down to the platform. His mother and Clarice went to him.

"Mater! Clarice, old girl," he said, holding them off with his left hand. "Wait a bit. Keep off my shoulder and thighs." He turned to the Tommy. "How about getting down to the street?"

"Take yer down in the luggage lift, sir," the porter said.

"Good. Look after my bags."

The Tommy went to the guard's van and got Ed's luggage together. His mother and Clarice went with him to the dirty, greasy, smelly lift, and descended slowly to the street level. It was no simple task getting him into the motor.

"Tell Barnes to drive quietly," he said, when he was laid out on the back seat. "I'm better standing. Can't sit or bend very well—bandages, you know."

"Ed, dear, ought you to have taken such a journey so soon?" his mother asked.

"Anything's better than that hospital. Besides, I wanted to get back—anywhere away from London. I'll be all right in a week or two. Clarice, old girl, I'm a bit of a crock."

She sat on a front seat with her knees pressed into the edge of the cushion on which he reclined. His left side and arm rested in her lap, and she clasped his free hand. She could not speak. Once or twice on the platform she said, "Ed, old—," but she nearly choked. She gulped down every rising sob, and whenever he raised his eyes to hers she pressed his hand against her breasts. His mother sat quite still, and in the darkness let the tears she had stifled flow in silence. She wondered what was the name of the wounded Tommy, where he lived; the poor, white, thin lad who was so gentle with Ed and who stood, as the motor moved away, erect as on parade and saluted. She would find out. What a way to come home! She thought of thousands—the millions of mothers of men who came back battered, bruised and broken. And those whose boys never came back. She thought of all the aching hearts, of all the tears. Into the panorama passing through her mind came the scene at the Coronation review when she saw Ed for the first time in a captain's uniform. She remembered her thoughts and her gladness at seeing a clean-limbed handsome man, full of health and vigor. How proud she was to be the mother of fine bred men. And now, that sprawling, wounded fellow, helped by a porter

and a wounded Tommy, was what the army gave her back in return for her labor and care.

As the car went slowly through the little town of Benningdale the few oil lamps in the streets threw dim shafts of light across his face, and she wondered at the strange look in his eyes. She could not think of anything else like it but the old cunning look she once saw in a wrinkled senile child. It haunted her, and she was glad when the car turned out of the village into the darkness of the country road. Had they tortured his soul? That was a look which expressed a terrible loathing, she was sure. Such a look as a tortured creature might wear between visits to the rack. Was that the look left by modern war on sensitive souls? She was sure only a brutal injury to the soul could account for such a light in his eyes.

When they had got him into the house, and she had given orders for her sitting-room on the ground floor to be made into a bedroom for him, she and Clarice were relieved for they could set to work in earnest to minister to his wants.

"What'll you do, mater? Sure it won't be depriving you?" he asked, as he lay on her great couch.

"It will be your room," she said. "Now I'll run off and see to some food."

Clarice took his boots off and found his slippers. They were alone.

"Rotten nuisance, old girl, isn't it?"

"Rather. We'll soon have you fit, though."

"There's nothing much wrong, you know. Nothing very serious, I mean. Right shoulder, this hand and my thigh. All pretty clean wounds. Lost half my

hand, but I can wear a glove and keep the thing out of sight. Rotten luck that."

"Why didn't some one come down with you, Ed?"

"Didn't want any one. Dad wished to come, but I wouldn't let him."

Something like a sneer flickered about his lips, and his brows contracted, the muscles twitching tremulously.

"I haven't been able to talk to any one, old girl," he muttered. "Only with the nurse. She was a wonder. Set me thinking above a bit. You know I'm not much at deep stuff. But she told me things that made me feel I ought to shut up for years—not speak at all—only think, just think."

She looked in astonishment at him. It was not like Ed to talk in that strain. She changed the subject, it made her feel uncomfortable.

"Who was the jolly little Tommy?" she asked.

"Lives in Minsterley. Looked after me all the way down. Knows me. Nephew of Tonks down in the village. Lost two brothers. Good little chap."

She unbuttoned his tunic and fixed his pillows. Suddenly she shook from head to foot and her knees gave way. Before he realized what had happened her head was on his breast and her body throbbing in a paroxysm of grief. Her tears ran in streams down his breast. He felt them trickling under his arms and down his side. He soothed her—soothed her, in his big kindly way. Told her to buck up, and keep a stiff upper lip. He was all right, and she need not be ashamed of him. Everything would come all right, and he would hole out on the eighteenth green and put in his card. Clarice soon had

herself in hand again, and when his mother returned to tell him the bed would soon be ready, she and Ed were chatting about Cricket and Wilmslow.

Doctor Raymond came out each day from Minsterley; he installed Lady Horton-Birkett and Clarice nurses to tend and dress Ed's wounds. Christmas came and passed, and Harold often came in to have a pipe with the patient who was up and about long before his hand healed. Evelyn sat and read to him by the hour, though Ed seldom heard all she said. Before he left his bed he would lie and look at her with curious eyes full of affection. They had not told him, and he wondered should he tell her of that frightful moment when Herbert looked into his face and cried out, "Cricket, for God's sake, Ed." He dared not let it dwell in his thoughts, it was too terrible, too horrible, for consideration. The memory of it came to him like a flash, and swiftly he had to exercise a great mental convulsion to shut it off, like dropping a shutter over a light. Some day he would tell her—tell her of the anguish, the wild love, the beseeching cry that was wrung from Herbert in that crashing moment when Ed's sword went through a German who fell at the feet of his old friend.

The day they read of the honor which came to Ed was one of torture to him. Half a column in the paper described how Ed went forward to Major Pomeroy-Fanton and carried him out of danger, and how Ed went back for Sergeant-Major Tudor and helped him to a place of safety. Harold ran up the Union Jack on the tower of the church. The school had a holiday that afternoon. The villagers came down at night with lanterns and cheered the

hero. Clarice drove her mother over to Crowington to kiss the Victoria Cross man. Evelyn stayed to dinner. More of the family gathered at the table than had been there for a long time. Sir Alfred rushed up from town and found dozens of telegrams of congratulation from all parts of the country. Why had Ed not told them? How like him to say nothing. It was a triumph. What about the lying rumors of his being in disgrace now? It was a glorious vindication.

Everybody seemed to appreciate the honor but the hero. He didn't want to talk about the affair. At lunch he was plied with questions, then in about one hundred words he told them all he remembered of the fight. "Only fellows who write about it and haven't been in it can go into details," he said. What concerned Ed chiefly was how the thing had been done. The Victoria Cross! Fanton and Tudor would be grateful and talk a lot about it. But Jawton! What had happened to make Jawton a party to the business? The more Ed thought of it, the deeper his perplexity. He had seen Fanton and Tudor just before he left France. The major was very bad—a horrible wound in the stomach. Tudor was lame, but otherwise progressing well. Neither said anything to Ed about Jawton. It was a mystery.

In some strange way the Victoria Cross brought to the Crowington family some relief from the gloom which had settled on the house since Ed was wounded. The little ornament had not been formally presented to him; the coveted bit of metal had not yet been struck. But the news that he was to receive it dispelled the feeling of horror which had afflicted

them, and thoughts of the woe of war seemed to give place to those of the glory of battle. This extraordinary change was perhaps attributable as much to the large way in which Sir Alfred spoke at dinner of the mission of the Allies as to the decoration Ed was to receive. Evelyn, however, did not rejoice. Of course, it would not be natural in her case, Sir Alfred thought, though it might be national. Clarice and her mother remembered they were daughter and widow of a soldier, and Lady Horton-Birkett knew she was mother of three. Evelyn left them early, glad to get out of earshot of her father's tags and perorations.

When the ladies retired for the night, Sir Alfred and Ed sat up for a while over another whisky and a pipe. Voluble father and reticent son sat buried in large chairs staring at the fizzing, squealing logs. They smoked in silence for some time.

"I wish you would come up to town for a night, Ed," Sir Alfred said. "I should like to give a quiet dinner—"

Ed cut him off: "No—not likely."

Sir Alfred was half prepared for the answer.

"Well, will you let my Humberton people have a look at you?"

"No, indeed. You'll not drag me through the streets of your constituency. I hate that kind of thing."

His father winced. He had made a mistake.

"You're safe enough there, aren't you, without doing that kind of thing?" Ed said moodily.

It was said in just the way that Jawton disliked. Ed did not mean to be unkind, indeed he was not

conscious of saying anything cutting. It was just his way of saying simply, bluntly, what came to his mind. His father looked hurt. Ed, however, did not turn his eyes that way. He sat and watched the logs twisting, rising and falling, in the blazing grate.

"Anyway, I'm not going to take it," he said, after a long pause.

"Eh? Take what?" yawned his father.

"The cross."

Sir Alfred sat up and swung round quickly.

"You're not going to take the cross?"

"No."

His father gasped and struggled to speak. The logs tumbled down to the hearth, and save for a flickering end or two of wood, only a charred, white, trellised marked heap of shanks, remained of the tough timbers.

"It's a left-handed apology," Ed said, "and I'm not going to take it."

"What d'you say?"

"It's not what I want."

"What do you want, then?"

"Jawton to set me right. That's all, dad."

"But doesn't the Victoria Cross do that?"

"No, it doesn't."

"Then will you have the goodness to tell me what is the trouble between you and Colonel Jawton? I might as well tell you that I wrote to him—"

"Wrote to him! I wish you'd mind your own business."

"I couldn't stand it. All those rumors about your finking it. They nearly drove me mad."

"Did Jawton reply?"

"No, he didn't. An unmannerly man, I should say."

Ed smiled and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"I should like to know what happened."

Ed rose and strode up and down the room several times. He stopped at the back of his father's chair and laid his left hand on his father's head. The action startled Sir Alfred. It was the first expression of an affectionate touch he had received from Ed for a good many years.

"Will you keep quiet? Not tell a soul?"

"Ed—"

"Will you?"

"On my honor."

Ed threw a couple of logs on the embers and recharged his pipe.

"It isn't much to talk about, but it finished me. Orders came down early one morning there was going to be a row, and that our lot should get ready to go forward. Then the order was countermanded because mist gathered heavily. Things got so hot as the afternoon wore on that we all looked for a new order to move. No order came. Nothing. At five our shells were spilling in among us, and German machine-guns were spitting death in showers. But no order. Then our wings started, and our men broke hell for leather. Before we got on—fifty or sixty yards, I should think—the Germans came up right under us. It was thick—horrible. Dust, blood, smoke, yells and the roar and splutter of the guns. It was a mix-up—a shocking mêlée. Well, when it was over, and we got back, out of a thousand we had two hundred and nine. Seventy-five per cent. of the

officers killed and wounded. Jawton, without a scratch, went for those of us who could stand up, but all his fury broke on me. Every officer agreed no order came down. Jawton swore he sent it. He didn't, and he knew he didn't. Hence his rage."

Sir Alfred sat and wiped the beads of sweat from his head and neck.

"But why were you the only one to—" he gasped.

"Jawton called me aside and said, 'It's you, you white-livered cur, that's at the bottom of this. You bloody well fuked it.'"

"Good gracious! Did he know you were wounded?"

"What if he did? That had nothing to do with it."

"I'll have that fellow cashiered—"

"You'll do nothing of the kind."

"But, Ed—"

"Remember! Not a word to any one."

"Did he know you had carried Major Fanton and Sergeant-Major—?"

"No. And that didn't matter, dad. Well, now you know the kind of thing many of us have to take. But I'll take no more. I'm done."

Ed sat down and pulled quietly at his pipe. The fresh logs sparkled with flames which sent flickering shadows across the ceiling and about the walls. There they sat in silence for many minutes. Sir Alfred was wide awake and busy with a thousand thoughts. Some of them hurt badly. Robert was out there "somewhere in France," and Fred was eager to go. The shell and bullet business was never so good. The dividend for the past year had risen to twenty-eight per cent.

"Look here, dad. Just see some one up in town

and let it be known that the cross affair should be quietly dropped—”

“But, Ed—that is—”

“Never mind. You do it. I shan’t take it. I don’t want it. Say anything you like. You know the man to go to about it. Will you, now?”

“Certainly—if you’ve made up your mind.”

“I have.”

“It’s a great pity.”

“I’m sorry to disappoint you.”

Sir Alfred knew it was no use arguing the matter with Ed. He could see he meant it.

“I’ll take my medicine, but I’ll be no party to the kind of crass stupidity—incompetency—which sends thousands to their death without a chance. War is war, I know. But there’s been far too much blundering so far to go without protest.”

“Blundering, Ed?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve heard the most extraordinary rumors in the clubs, but I couldn’t believe them.”

“The rumors may be false, but the blundering I refer to will, if things are not soon changed, lead us to disaster. Besides—it’s all very well in its way to protect the reputations of the men at the top, but more important still is the question of sparing the lives of the men who have to do the biggest part of the fighting. There is such a thing as unnecessary slaughter taking place once too often.”

It was two o’clock when they rose to go to bed. When they reached the hall they saw Lady Horton-Birkett coming down the stairs. She stopped on seeing them.

"How you frightened me," she exclaimed. "I went to your rooms twice. Do come, Alfred. You ought not to keep Ed up so late. I've had a horrible dream."

"All right, mater, it's my fault. Good night, dad," he said.

He put his left arm round his mother and took her to her bedroom.

CHAPTER X

WHEN Ellen's telegram reached Ben he saw that it must have been delivered at his lodgings early in the afternoon. He had been away to report a meeting. What should he do? It was after six, and her train was due in London about five. The maid at his lodgings said no lady had called for him. When he reached the station Ellen was sitting near the bookstall reading a copy of Shaw's *Common Sense About the War*.

"I thought it better to wait," she said. "We might have crossed. Well, here I am. What are you going to do with me?"

They went to Gatti's for dinner.

"Where are you going?—I mean, do you go to Horton House or Crowington?" he asked.

"I don't know, I'll see. There's no hurry for a day or two."

She was satisfied with him. How well he looked. So refined and sure of himself. His ease and gladness sent a warm glow coursing through her breast.

"If I go to Crowington, will you get away for a few days and come down?"

"Yes, I've had no holiday for over a year. I could stay with my people or get a room somewhere."

His eyes danced with pleasure.

"How did you get away from Dresden?" he asked.

"I didn't want to get away. There was no difficulty. Have you heard of the Von Holsts?"

"The German count who took Wilmslow?"

"Yes. He and Evelyn were engaged. I've been staying most of the time with his mother—an English woman, a Martindale. She wanted to know about Evelyn. Every letter she receives from her son is full of Cricket—Cricket—Cricket,—my sister's pet name. He's fighting—been wounded twice. I saw him the last time he was convalescing at his mother's house. About a fortnight ago. He saw Ed in a battle about the end of October."

"Saw your brother—in battle?"

"Face to face. That is the second time I've heard of friends meeting. The other is quite interesting. The son of Parvenstadt, the Dresden doctor, went in June to Château d'Oex with his aunt's family,—Belgians. Antwerp people. At Château d'Oex they met a party of Americans. Well, young Parvenstadt, Ulric, and his cousin, Ernest, from Antwerp, fell in love with the same girl—one of the Americans. They played tennis, they danced, they climbed together. One night in July these two young men suddenly disappeared, leaving their parents to make apologies to their friends. After war broke out their families got home as best they could, and the Americans went into Italy. In one of the battles before Antwerp, Ulric and Ernest met, both severely wounded. They were shipped off to Cologne. Ernest was a prisoner, and after a while he died. Ulric went home when he was well enough, and one day in Dresden met the father of the American girl he fell in love with at Château d'Oex. Romantic, eh?"

"Terrible. And all to happen in a few months."

When they had finished dinner she asked him to take her to his rooms and see if she could get lodgings in the house. There were rooms to be had on the floor below. A small bedroom and a good-sized sitting-room at the back. She sent to the station for her box and bags.

"Do they know you are here?" he asked.

"I'll write to-night."

Without her hat and coat, at ease on a sofa, before the fire, what a wisp of a creature she looked; with her little hands, so plump, and her dainty feet, which seemed small for her short delicate body. She looked at him with eyes full of amusement, full of a kindly satire. She knew few women had ever been so near and free with him. She knew he was perplexed—rather uneasy—but as loyal, as firm as ever.

"You're still a worker, eh, Ben?" she inquired.

He started and glanced quickly at her: "Yes."

"Still in love with your work?" she asked.

"More than ever——" he muttered.

She hoped he would say Ellen. He was always so deferential. In his letters it was "my good friend."

"You make a decent living?"

"Oh, yes—quite—always enough. You see I have no ties. My father and sisters do very well, you know."

"Have you many friends?"

"Numbers—all over the country. I speak a lot."

"I must hear you speak," she said, shaking up a pillow and fixing her head on it. "I want to see you on the platform. Women must admire you, Ben."

"Women?" He had not thought of them. He laughed and shook his head.

"Come and sit here and tell your old, old friend all about it."

She made room on the sofa for him, a niche near her waist.

"Come."

She extended her hand, and her soul thrilled at his physical shyness and spirited ecstasy. He rose timidly, his face full of wonderment. Happiness shown in his eyes. Her little hand, so firm and warm, lay in his. He sat down as if he were afraid his great form would crush her.

"That's right. Don't be afraid, you'll not crush me. I'm not brittle, Ben."

He dare not look at her eyes. He fixed his on her supple fingers, and played tenderly with them.

"Are you really glad to see me?"

"I never thought of such gladness——" he turned his head and met her eyes full upon him. And over her he bowed low, drawn down by the appealing light on her face. She raised her arm and gently drew him to her for the kiss she had hungered for so long.

"I've waited so patiently," she whispered. "Do you understand? I couldn't let another day pass. I have been ready for you any time since I went away. And you were ready for me. But you would not speak. I know. I've known all along, Ben."

No, she would have nothing to do with banns and church ceremony. A license would satisfy her—if he desired that much. But the old leaven was in him. She must be really legally his wife.

He arranged for a week's leave to begin the day of his marriage. While he finished some literary work and cleaned up arrears at the office, Ellen went down to Crowington to see her people.

Ed went to the station to meet her. His hand was not well enough for driving though he knew the chestnut would have taken him with one hand. Evelyn and Clarice had gone into Minsterley to do some shopping, and Ellen's wire reached Crowington after they left. As the motor turned up the village street Ben's father came out of his house. He tipped his hat, and Ellen stopped the car.

"How are you, Mr. Tonks?" she cried, and shot her hand out of the window.

Tonks took it, rather abashed at Ellen's familiarity, and mumbled: "Nicely, thanks, miss."

"Good sort, Tonks," Ed said, as they resumed their journey.

"Yes, very. I'm going to marry his son on Tuesday," she murmured.

"The deuce you are."

"Fact." She gave an emphatic nod and smiled.

"What next, I wonder. Bit of a hurry, isn't it?"

"We've been in love for years and years—ever since he played my accom—"

"That night? You don't say. And all the time you've been in Germany?"

"All. But—no love-letters, Ed—not one."

"He's devilish clever, isn't he? Writer, too, they say. Awful Socialist—or something, eh?"

"Mild—not nearly enough to please me."

"What? Get on."

"I'm a thoroughgoing philosophical anarchist."

"Lord, what's that, Ellen?"

"Something awful—down with church and state and all the rest of it."

Ed loved the merry elfish look in her eyes. They were going to be great pals.

"The mater!" He laughed heartily for the first time since July. "She'll curl up proper when she hears."

"Dad's away, isn't he? I went to Horton House and to the Commons."

"Up north somewhere—opening a new plant, I think." Ed frowned.

"Coining money, eh?"

"Don't Ellen. It's too awful—shocking."

"How's dad's God getting on?"

"He's taken him into partnership. But let's drop that, little 'un. It isn't nice a bit."

She was glad to find out what her brother thought about it all.

"I wish I could earn my own living like you, Ellen. But that's not possible now. Here we are."

The car passed up the drive. Lady Horton-Birkett was waiting on the steps. After the usual salutations Ed drew Ellen away to the drawing-room piano.

"Come, little 'un, and play."

They gathered near the instrument and watched her attack the keyboard. The years in Dresden had made a musician of Ellen. She was the only member of her family who had talent. Mother and son sat in amazement while Ellen played a Schubert impromptu. Then she passed to the Chopin *Fantasia* and some short pieces of Brahms.

"Did you compose all these pieces?" her mother asked.

"No, mater—Brahms, Chopin and Schubert. But I'll play some of mine. This is called *Clouds*."

It was the piece she wrote for Heinrich Ulm. The opening was in broad chords denoting sunrise on a clear morning. Little clouds gather and the wind rises. The sun is obscured. Rain begins to fall. The leaves rustle and the trees creak. Somber clouds gather and are blown fiercely across the sky. Far away the sun breaks through the clouds. Then all is dark and the rain falls in torrents. A terrible gale rages and slowly dies away. The wind changes and the sky clears. The sun struggles through again, the last cloud passes away, and the heavens become fine and calm. As a picture piece it was justly popular.

"What a very strange composition," her mother said.

"I knew you would prefer the giants, mater," she laughed, as she took her head and kissed her. "Now I'll play some of your old favorites."

Then for half an hour she played old waltzes, old ballads, bits from *The Mikado*, *The Geisha*, and so on. She made Ed whistle and beat time with his finger. Her mother was all smiles. She knew the tunes.

In her mother's room Ellen told the story of her engagement to Ben Tonks. Lady Horton-Birkett did not remember him. She had quite forgotten the night of the concert, Ellen's début. Minsterley Show was another matter; she had worried fearfully about the lost child.

"What is he like?"

"Like? I don't know—don't know how to describe him," she said slowly, surveying him in her mind's eye. "He's a biggish man, but easy, gentle and rather reserved. He's a thinker. The worst that can be said of him is that he has no vices—none I know of. He is very human, but as moderate as an animal out of captivity. He looks like an athlete."

"Is he well-off?"

Ellen smiled and shrugged her shoulders: "He can keep himself decently."

"Can he keep you, too, decently?"

"We can keep ourselves."

"But you will be very well-off, Ellen."

"You mean——"

"Your father is very rich."

"We shall not need father's riches. I've kept myself for over two years now——"

"But there will be your share of my aunt's property," her mother said. "It's not a great deal, Ellen—about two thousand a year it brings in."

"That is different——"

"How different?"

"Well, I shan't take my father's money."

Lady Horton-Birkett could not follow the drift of Ellen's thought. Money was money to her mother, no matter where it came from.

"You're a strange girl."

She did not hear that. Her mind was fixed on something Ed had said to her in the car. "I wish I could earn my own living like you," he said, and she understood what prompted him to say it.

"Your aunt's property will go to me and Evelyn, won't it?" Ellen asked.

"Yes, and I've thought of making it over to you now. I haven't spoken to dad about it, but——"

"Could you make it over to us now if you wished?"

"Oh, yes."

"I wish you would."

"I'll see what your father says."

Her mother seemed to be resigned to anything. Ellen pondered the great change that had taken place in her. She expected a lecture on social distinction, difference of birth and position, but her mother made no objection, nor did she offer congratulation. She listened to Ellen's description of Ben's career with an impersonal interest. Inquisitive she might have felt, but she gave no indication of desiring particulars and details of courtship. She was not her old self. Ellen thought there was a listlessness about her sometimes that was sad to watch. Her energetic, confident mother was changed, and Ellen would have been better pleased if there had been an outburst of displeasure at her marrying Ben Tonks.

"Evelyn's at Wilmslow," she said dreamily. "You'll see. Perhaps I should warn you. Herbert settled the place on her."

"I know. He told me."

"Herbert did?"

"I saw him a few weeks ago at his mother's place."

"Oh, then you've seen Adorable."

"She sent love to you and Cricket."

Her mother sighed wearily. Her eyes grew dim. Her hands lay lifeless in her lap.

"Cricket's going to have a child," she murmured.

Ellen's face lost all its elfish look, and a glow spread over it like a beautiful veil. A quiver of delight shot through her. An impatience to see Evelyn seized her, she wanted to be near her, to tell her about Herbert and Adorable, to comfort her and share her joy as she had shared her sorrow.

Ed was practising writing with his left hand, an exercise which occupied him for several hours every day, when Ellen found him in the library.

"Will Clarice and Cricket come here or go to Halts on the other line?" she asked.

"They motored in from Wilmslow. They'll go straight home. I'm going to Clungford to dine to-night."

"Get the car out and let's be off," she urged. "You can drop me at Wilmslow."

From all physical appearances Ellen and Evelyn might not have sprung from the same race let alone from the same parents. They were totally different women. Evelyn was like Ed; tall, strongly built, robustly healthy, handsome figure and strong face. Little Ellen was a by-product, so Ed had often said. "Little 'un" she was always called before she went away to Germany. It was a strange meeting: Ellen lost in the arms of her big young sister, and Evelyn's great tears soaking through her hair. Ellen all smiles and radiantly happy to be with Cricket, Herbert's love, heavy with child. Ed couldn't make it out. He was puzzled.

"I left—Clarice—at—at Clungford, Ed. Be off. I—I—want Ellen—all to myself," Evelyn sniveled, as she turned to the porch and drew her sister into the house.

Ed watched them for a moment, then he lit a cigarette and got up beside the chauffeur: "Clungford, Barnes."

There had been so far no difficulty about the servants at Wilmslow Lodge. Lady Horton-Birkett found a housekeeper and told her the place belonged to Miss Evelyn. And Miss Evelyn she was called. The under servants were maids from the neighborhood who knew the Horton-Birkett family; the gardeners were Scotch; the grooms were Irish. It was a bigish establishment to keep up. But with a large account to draw on at Von Holst's bank in London there was no reason to curtail expenses. Evelyn was well provided for. The whispers of the servants in the hall about the condition and position of the mistress they loved had not gone beyond the place. The constant visits of the Clungford people, and Lady Horton-Birkett, gave an appearance of respectability to an otherwise mysterious eventuality. It must be all right, the servants thought, or her mother and Lady Clungford would not be so free and open about it.

"Poor dear, she's married to 'im, an' don't want to let on because 'e's a German," Sally Charles whispered to Jack Munro, the second gardener.

"Ye ken aboot richt," Jack nodded. "Ma ain opinion is the puir lass is fair fasht at the blatter aboot spies, an' aw that. A hay ma douts aboot all the haverin' in the papers. But what the deils didna ken 'ull no offend their patriotic impulses."

As time passed the servants accepted the notion that Evelyn was married to Von Holst, but that she did not wish to be classed as an alien. It was the

agitation in the newspapers against alien enemies that forced them to that conclusion.

The news of Von Holst Ellen brought from Germany to Evelyn was so precious, every word was like gold to her. "Go on," she would cry when Ellen took breath. She kissed the "little 'un" a dozen times, and once nearly squeezed all the life out of her when she said: "He told me to tell you to live for him in happiness and never grieve. He feels sure he will come back for you. He firmly believes any one loving as he does can't be killed."

Then she told Evelyn about Von Holst 'seeing Ed in battle and speaking to him. How he escaped death that day was a mystery explainable only on his theory of the survival of a great love. Adorable knew everything and accepted everything.

"When Herbert reached Harwich in August he wrote to his bank in London and told them to notify you to draw on his account for whatever you wished," Ellen said. "That was fine, for it made you independent of dad.

"Yes, but I didn't think of that," Evelyn murmured. "I only wanted to keep this place together. This was to be our home. How he loved it! It will be just as he wanted it when he comes back. I spend only what is necessary."

"Do you see dad often?" Ellen inquired.

"No—very seldom. I told him to keep away."

"I can't tell you how glad I am you take none of his money, Cricket."

"You refer to the money from armaments?" Evelyn asked, not sure of her sister's meaning.

"Blood money."

"I hadn't thought of it."

"Well, you're independent now. Listen! You know the Haughmond property? Well, the mater told me to-day she thought of making it over to us. You know it would come to us on mother's death. It amounts to about two thousand pounds a year."

"Is that all?"

"About that. Now, darling Cricket, I want you to promise me you'll join me in making it all over to Ed as soon as we get it."

"Ed. But won't he get all—"

"He would—but don't you see. Listen. Coming up in the car he told me he wished he could earn his own living. Cricket, he doesn't like to be dependent on dad's money. Really he doesn't. Won't you let him have Haughmond if mother will make it over to us?"

"Of course, little 'un—yes."

Then Ellen told her of her coming marriage to Ben Tonks. It was an hour of pure joy telling her sister all about him. The reserve she felt on telling the story to her mother disappeared, and she indulged her desire to praise Ben to the utmost. Evelyn listened as if it were an old romance in modern dress. It was like the princess and the shepherd boy, or some such tale of silent love told at last.

"I never thought of you that way," Evelyn sighed.

"I know. You all thought I was made to be a celebrated spinster fiddling to protect my virtue from long-haired Bohemians. I know, Cricket, what you all thought about me. But I have as great a capacity for deep insatiable love in my little body as any one

twice my size. How I envy you, Cricket! Well, I shall have a child. You'll see, darling."

Later that evening Ellen sent to Crowington for her box. Evelyn persuaded her to spend the few days with her. The note Lady Horton-Birkett received was brief.

"Dear Mater,

"I shall stay with Evelyn for a few days. Please have them pack my box and put it on the car.

"Affectionately,
"Ellen."

There was nothing sad in that, nothing to cry about. But Lady Horton-Birkett wept bitterly.

Ed was at Clungford. The house was silent, lonely. She was alone and unhappy.

CHAPTER XI

THESE were the days when Harold found many ways of expressing himself on the glories of war when conducted by a people who were in league with God. He had no doubt as to who was right and who was wrong. The God of his fathers had never deserted the country which had spread light and morality all over the globe. Though there were serious reverses, and victory seemed long in coming, the end was not in doubt. "Onward, Christian Soldiers" became a part of the service every Sunday at Crowington Church. And Harold's sermons packed full of atrocity stories called louder and louder, as the weeks passed, for retribution and annihilation. The more wounded men seen about the village the more earnestly he cried for recruits. The long casualty lists told in plainer words than he was master of, the story of the cowardice of shirkers. But Britain would triumph, and the fight for Christian civilization would endure until the last man and the shilling were gone. Even if he had to go into one of his father's shops, and help to make shells—rather than the domination of a godless Prussia.

The alien enemy hunt agitation occupied his attention, and he wrote long letters to the papers urging wholesale interment, reprisals and national service. He studied German literature for the first time in his life, with a zest far beyond any attempt he ever made in studying English literature. German authors

helped his sermons, quotations saved him much exertion, and Nietzsche was a gold mine of blasphemous sentences to hurl at the dozen or two sleepy farmer folk who went to his church. He was so ready with German names—authors and titles of books—that his fellow parsons, knowing no more than Harold, began to pay him the respect due an authority. He was full of wind and spleen in those days. The bishop asked him to preach a series of sermons at the cathedral. He became popular with the adherents of Anglican militancy, and stood well with the real old county families.

Soon after the war began his father urged him to put his wife's money in armament firms. She had a few thousands scattered about in soap, rubber, tea and margarine companies, paying about five per cent. The change was effected and prosperity shone on Mrs. Harold's new investments. Sir Alfred made her a present of a small block of shares in the Haigh Shell and Bullet Company on the birth of his first grandson. Mrs. Harold was almost reconciled to dissent and liberalism by the kindness of her father-in-law.

"Things are going very well, eh, 'dad?" Harold remarked, in an offhand manner.

"Very badly, my boy——"

Harold blanched and looked alarmed. "Badly!"

"You mean the front?"

"No, the front—no! Business." Harold blurted, with a big sigh of relief.

"Oh, yes, oh, I see. Thought you meant the western front or the Russians. Business, yes—very

well, indeed. But I'm afraid it's going to be a long drawn out affair."

"It does drag a bit."

"I wish it were over," his mother sighed.

"Patience, mother, patience. Wait until we are ready for the great offensive in May. Then!"

"Evie, did I tell you a Zeppelin passed over our old house at Hampstead and dropped a bomb not a hundred yards from it?" Sir Alfred said.

"Mercy!" his wife gasped. "No, you didn't tell me."

"Providence! Eh, Harold? You know we might have been there yet if——" Sir Alfred muttered, with a reverent shake of his head.

"God has been good to us," Harold observed.

His mother looked out of the window and coughed. "Um!" she said.

"When is the House going to deal seriously with all these alien enemies and spies?" Harold asked.

"I can't say. The Government is slow about it."

"It's my opinion Germans here signal to these airships and do all sorts of things."

His mother's heart fluttered uneasily. It was a topic she always strove to avoid. Harold had not been told of Evelyn's condition. All he knew of his sister's residence at Wilmslow was that Von Holst had given her the property when they became engaged.

"Spies are all over the country," Sir Alfred said. "A very influential man was deported only the other day. It's not known outside, and it will be kept quiet. He was caught corresponding through a third person in Holland."

"Shameful. They ought to shoot a few," the vicar exclaimed.

Lady Horton-Birkett coughed and tried to catch her husband's eye, but she failed.

Harold was on his feet: "I heard a nice story the other day when I was in Minsterley. I was told—and the information comes from the highest authority—" Just then Ed came into the room, and his mother rose to greet him, thankful Harold's story was interrupted.

"Hullo, Ed," Harold nodded. "When are you going up to get your cross?"

"Not yet a bit. Go on with the information from the highest authority," he said. "Sorry to interrupt."

"Oh, yes. But you won't like it, I'm thinking. It's about your pal, Von Holst."

"What about him?"

"One of the worst spies——"

"It's a lie," Ed put in quietly.

"Fact, Ed." Harold smiled and nodded with certainty.

"It's a lie." Ed sharpened his tone.

"Harold, please be careful," his mother pleaded.

"What should Ed know about it?" the vicar demanded. "My information is guaranteed——"

"What is it? Out with it!" Ed ordered.

"Don't bully me, Ed. I won't have it."

"Don't wriggle. No cant now. Come on. Who told you?"

"That is private."

"And the information, too?" sneered Ed.

"Well, if you want to know he's been buying

horses for the German army," Harold snapped triumphantly.

Ed laughed derisively: "At five hundred pounds a piece. Present my compliments to your informant whether he's an archdeacon or a recruiting general, and tell him I say he lies. The only horse Herbert assisted in sending to Germany was the one I presented to his mother. Now listen. To save you from making a complete ass of yourself let me tell you how things stand——"

"Ed, no, no," from his mother in tears.

"Please don't, Ed," his father cried.

Harold was pale and trembling from anger.

Ed put his mother aside and waved his father from him. He went slowly over to Harold and looked him straight in the face.

"You should have known Evelyn was engaged to Herbert. You know that, but you forgot. They would have been married had it not been for their desire to see Clarice and me married first. They put theirs off so that ours should be the big do. You would have married them. Don't forget that. Well, war upsets a lot of plans, and in the rush Evelyn and Herbert hadn't time to do things in the conventional way."

"You mean he——"

"I mean Evelyn's going to have a child——"

"Good heavens!"

"Awkward, isn't it?"

"But the disgrace, Ed——"

"Not so bad as if you married 'em."

Ed walked away to the window, lit a cigarette and strolled out into the garden.

"You brought this on yourself," his mother said sadly. She went to Harold and caressed him. "Come, don't be angry. Poor Ed has an awful lot to put up with."

"I should think he has," Harold sneered bitterly. "So would any one who was known as a funk——"

"How dare you?" his father cried.

"Dad, dad——" his wife pleaded beseechingly.

"If I thought you believed that dastardly story I'd leave you without a penny," Sir Alfred throbbed with indignation. He stood with clenched hands before Harold trembling with rage.

"You've never cared for me," Harold whined. "Because I would have nothing to do with your ranting chapel lot. You've hated me ever since I entered the church."

"And I gave you this living. Go to your vicarage and don't let me see you again."

"Oh, this horrible, detestable war," Lady Horton-Birkett sobbed, as she passed out of the room.

Harold had sunk deep into a big armchair. Dejection covered him. He twisted the bowl of his pipe in his white hands, and stared at the toes of his father's boots which were shaped like the claws of a crab. He began to count with the ticking of his watch.

"Do you believe that story of Ed funking?" his father asked in a deeply grieved tone.

"Everybody does."

"That's not true—for I've seen Major Pomeroy-Fanton and he says no one at the front believes it—but Jawton. And he will have to take back what he said to Ed."

"Will he?"

"Well, they'll want to know why Ed will not accept the Victoria Cross."

"Not accept——"

"Ed won't take it. Won't have it."

Sir Alfred looked at Harold with a glance of contempt.

"Anyway, you have earned the distinction of being about the only man who thinks the Victoria Cross is presented to cowards. Now, Harold, I want to tell you what I think about your very dear friends round about here and in Minsterley. I know the set you're in, and the people you get your information from. Three of your political and religious friends have owed me money they borrowed some years ago—one is a very high churchman, another is a landlord—I see, you know the men I mean. Well to-morrow or the next day I ask them to meet their I. O. U.s——"

"No, no—for heaven's sake. Not my wife's uncle. Not the archdeacon. Please don't." He followed his father as he passed to and fro. "I'm awfully sorry, dad. I lost my temper, really. You know what a beastly bad one I've got. I'm very sorry for what I've said."

Sir Alfred's relations with the business world taught him how to avenge himself on impecunious swells. He knew the archdeacon hadn't a stiver to bless himself with. He had been in debt for years. He knew Mrs. Harold's uncle lived from hand to mouth. He knew these men despised him, and borrowed his money. He knew they influenced Harold and used him constantly. The threat to ask for the money hurt Harold more than a blow from a fist. He curled up like a feather before the fire.

For several days after the interview with his father he was remarkably quiet. It was the first time in Sir Alfred's life he felt like thrashing one of his progeny.

"Alfred, I want to give the Haughmond property to the girls," Lady Horton-Birkett said, as she lay beside her husband in bed one morning in May. "I wish you would attend to it."

"But why, Evie?"

"Do it to please me. Ellen hasn't much, you know."

"She can have all she wants."

"Yes, but you see, she insists on earning her own living."

"She's splendid, Evie. There's a girl for you! I wish there were more like her. Independent, fearless, and no nonsense about her. It is a pity they've been able to go to their own pace so much. I should have liked to see more of 'em. They've shot up before I've realized it. Sometimes I wonder if they're my children. I see so little of them now."

"You've been so busy, dad. But do transfer Haughmond to Ellen and Evelyn. Get it done for me."

"Very good, dear. I'll attend to it when I get to town. It isn't much, is it?"

"No, not much."

He often wondered why Ellen was so keen to earn her own living. He admired her for it, nevertheless, he would have liked to shower luxuries on her. Only once he thought she might not like his chief business in life. Only once, and then he dismissed the thought with scorn. It was a perfectly

legitimate industry. There was no law against making and selling shells. He was the last man in the world to want a war—the very last. Yet Ellen always made him feel when she sent him a line in recent years that she was heartily glad she wanted none of his money. She despised riches he knew, and she was an inveterate Socialist or something. Besides, he comforted himself with the notion got from Murger's *Vie de Boheme*, read on the quiet, that artists worked better on small incomes. After her return from Germany she had been rather facetious, badgering. She twitted him on armaments and religion. That he put down to her utter detestation of war and churchianity. She was a rebellious pacifist. He understood her, and did not take her gibes unkindly. She had always been a naughty child. She was spoiled by too much liberty when she was young, so he thought. Ellen, on the other hand, thought his mental hide was too thick.

She had, however, upset him by telling him the people in Germany were confident of success, that everything over there was orderly, and though the people were careful and frugal there was food enough. It sounded so pro-German. He didn't like it. He told her so.

"But I am pro-German," Ellen said.

"For goodness sake, dear, don't let any one hear you say that," he whispered in awe.

"Why not? You were a pro-Boer. I remember that. Can't one take sides?"

"No, not if you want a quiet life."

"Can't I be pro-German without being in favor of their detestable form of government?"

"You shouldn't be pro-German at all."

"What a nice country to live in. Is thinking permitted?"

"You little tease." He shook his finger at her half in play, and added gravely: "But I mean it—Britain is no place for rebels just now."

"The refuge of the oppressed is gone, eh? Have they dug up John Bright and burned his bones, dad?"

"You must be serious," he said.

"I will be, dad, and tell you what I think of your cry pro-German. It means no more than pro-Boer did. Be honest and admit the cry pro-German against English thinkers really means 'don't criticize the Government.' Every decent-minded person who thinks seriously, who wants to believe in the real good of people everywhere, is labeled anti-British. Pro-German as a cry means my country right or wrong. It means no questions are permitted. As a cry it is a cloak under which a body of incompetent statesmen can plunge a nation into an unnecessary war, conduct it with the greatest loss of life and at the greatest cost. That's what I think—seriously."

He looked at her in amazement. She meant it, he could tell she meant it all. And somehow there was enough of the old Radical strain left in him to admire her candor. Though he disagreed with her, he felt good to hear some one express an opinion of that kind without fear.

When Ellen sent him a note to the House asking him to meet her and Ben at the registrar's office, he was so tickled he could not refrain from telling two or three of his cronies in the smoke room of the Commons. There was some satisfaction in having

an unconventional daughter he thought. For her to marry a small farmer's son who had climbed up alone to be a well-known journalist, a novelist and a popular lecturer was unconventional he thought. And she looked such a bit of a thing as she stood beside Ben in the registrar's office.

"No presents, dad—remember, I mean it," Ellen said.

They went away to Ambleside for a week and roamed about Rydal and Langdale. Then they went back to Crowington. Her mother told her the Haughmond property had been transferred to her and Evelyn.

Ben got on very well with Ellen's mother. It was the first time she had come into contact with a Socialist or something, and the surprise to find such a person was refined—highly cultivated, she thought—gave her great pleasure. She had met a high church dignitary who was known to be a Socialist, but in his case he came of an old family, and he always voted Tory. Ben was different. His father lived in the village, and only a few days ago she saw him carting muck to the fields. Still the only matter that troubled Ellen's mother was the marriage. A legal marriage seemed to her almost worse than no marriage. It was a pity. Had they been married in a chapel it would not have been so bad. And there was Evelyn. How unusual both daughters should have acted so strangely. Heaven knows she had always striven to show them what's what in a properly conducted Anglican world. She had always been a great church-woman. Was her marriage a failure in that respect? She feared her daughters were athe-

ists. They never went to church now. Evelyn had not been to a service since the war broke out. And when she came to think of it Clarice, too, had not been seen at Crowington Church for months.

Tea on the lawn at Wilmslow, on a fine warm day, was an exceedingly pleasant way of spending an hour. The hills and woods of Mickley rose in tiers, intersected with small farms, for a distance of four miles. The view looking south was full of the charm of the Marches. To the north, a long valley widened away far off to the Staffordshire hills. Clive Hill stood like a primitive natural fortress down in the west—black and bulky against the sun sinking among the mountains of Wales.

Lady Horton-Birkett sipped her tea and regretted she had forgotten her saccharine. Evelyn, Clarice and Ellen were enjoying toasted muffins. Lady Clungford threw bits of biscuit to two Inverness pups. How any one could think of war and be present in that scene was almost inconceivable. The calm, the joy of the air, the early April rapture of the birds, the numberless greens in hedges, woods and gardens, the great blue, slightly cloud-ribbed sky, and yet each woman thought of the war. Lady Clungford thought of Billy; Clarice of him, cousins, friends—and Herbert. Lady Horton-Birkett thought of Ed—and Robert there, and Fred going. Evelyn's thoughts were all for the father of her child. And Ellen—well, her thoughts for the moment were on an inn at Chiem, beside the lake, far away in Bavaria, where she had stopped for a while in that last week of July.

"Have you seen Harold, Ellen?" her sister asked.

"No, what's he doing?"

"Praising the British God and bullying men to go where he'll never go himself," Evelyn muttered.

"Don't be too hard on Harold," her mother sighed.

"Hard on him? Mother, don't waste your sympathy on Harold. Really when I think of him I wonder if this isn't a parson's war," Evelyn cried.

"No, my dear, it's an old man's war," Lady Clungford interjected. "You take my tip, Cricket—old men!"

"Yes, there's something in that," Ellen agreed.

"Old fusty notions, senile creeds, fossilized methods, and tottering systems. And some of the old men are young in years—numbers of them. A week in London just now is enough to drive a healthy-minded creature to a mad house. You ought to see the recruiting posters——"

"I've heard of them. Awful, I'm told," Lady Clungford exclaimed, raising her hands on high.

"Really, the impression they conveyed to me was that the authorities implicitly believe seventy-five per cent. of the people of Britain are arrant cowards."

"Ellen!" her mother cried, shocked beyond measure.

"I've heard that, dear," Clarice nodded. "General Pennett says they are disgusting."

"And the literature! Horrors! It's nasty!" Ellen gasped.

"I think it would be better if the people went to church and tried to get into a Christian frame of mind," Lady Horton-Birkett said. "All this rancor and ill-feeling is most unseemly. In those beautiful letters in the *Times* written by Mr. Burroughs I find

great consolation. If I had my way I would print them in little books and send them into every home in the kingdom. We are suffering because we have forsaken God, because our souls are dark and selfish, and we shall not know happiness and peace again until we are at peace with ourselves."

Their eyes had a far away look in them. The quiet was wonderful. Somewhere in the lane, some distance off, a lad sang a few bars of *Tipperary*. Then from a meadow came the lowing of cattle calling to be milked. The silent intervals seemed to accentuate every sound. High above them a lark, like a speck in the sky, had been singing all the time.

After Lady Clungford and Clarice left them, Ellen asked when Ed and Clarice were to be married.

"I don't know," Evelyn murmured dreamily. "Since Ed came back Clarice hasn't said a word about it."

"Nothing has happened?"

"Nothing. They're the best of pals."

"What do you think, mater?" Ellen asked.

"I can't make it out, dear."

"You think something's up," Evelyn exclaimed.

"Well, no, not exactly. But I've noticed a change since Ed got better, since Clarice went home and he required no more nursing. He doesn't go over to Clungford so often now, and Clarice hasn't been to see us for quite a month."

Evelyn twisted restively: "I wonder what's up."

"They're not a demonstrative pair at any time," their mother muttered wearily. "Evelyn, you might speak to Clarice when you get a chance. She comes every day to see you, doesn't she?"

"Yes. She made up her mind to have Billy give her away, you know. Perhaps that's it. Now Billy is at the front she might not care—you know, Clarice is funny about some things. I don't know what's the matter. I'll ask her."

"I thought her brother was dead," Ellen remarked. "Died in India."

"He got over it. Awfully bad for some time. Drinks like a fish. Awful rotter, they say, but Clarice sticks to him like glue."

Lady Clungford, too, was anxious about Clarice and Ed. She had noticed something. It was subtle. They were every bit as happy as before, but of late, since Ed was well, they had not met so frequently. The coolness was noticeable when they were apart. It was a coolness which was only evident by contrast; and Lady Clungford was satisfied it existed and was growing, because Clarice spoke less and less to her of Ed.

"What's the row, Clarice?" she asked, after dinner one night. "You and Ed had a quarrel?"

"No. Quarrel? No, mother."

"But there's something up, I know. What is it?"

"Nothing. Really."

Great tears came gushing from her eyes. She sat tight for a moment trying to control herself. But the passion conquered her, and she threw herself down before her mother in a paroxysm of grief. Her head lay in her mother's lap. It was a long time before she mastered her emotion.

"Come now, tell me all about it."

"It—it's—the story about—about Ed—Ed funking it," she sobbed.

"Well, what about it?"

"He—he hasn't said anything—to—to me. Not—a word."

"Perhaps he can't. He might get some one into trouble if he did. What would the general"—she always called her husband the general—"say about it? Mum's the word. Can't be helped! Discipline! Orders!"

"He might have said—something to me."

"Maybe he doesn't dream you would put any stock in the yarn."

"But it's true. Billy says so——"

"Billy says so?"

"He wrote to me about it."

"The devil he did. Where's the letter?"

"Up-stairs."

"Get it. Let me see it."

Lady Clungford did not believe the story because her son said it was true. She knew Billy. It takes all kinds to make an army, anywhere, and she knew her son was not a thinker. Billy failed in everything, but got into the service somehow. A tutor at Brighton did something for him no one else could do. When Billy came into the title he made hay of the estate in five years. He now reposed in the hands of money-lenders and a few very shady commission merchants abroad. The war saved him many financial worries by giving him the refuge of the moratorium.

Clarice returned with the letter, tear-stained and

rather crumpled. Lady Clungford smoothed it out and put her glasses on.

"March 15, 1915.

"Dear Old Girl:

"I suppose you've heard all about E. H. B. and the rotten mess he's made of it. You must feel rotten. Well I don't wonder. And now I see he's recommended for the Vic. X. Good Lord! Out here they say it's influence. His dad's at the bottom of that. Good old J——n told me E. H. B. was always a slacker. Certainly he did something to redeem himself by helping his major and a sergeant to cover. Mighty glad of the excuse, if you ask me. Well, cheer up, old girl, there's plenty of fish in the sea. Don't break your heart over him. This is to say how sorry I am.

"Your loving brother,

"Billy.

"P. S. I'm comfortably fixed up down at the base, but as keen as mustard to have a go at them. Love to mother."

Clarice watched her mother's face as she read the letter. Lady Clungford turned it over once or twice, and then made a grimace. She handed it back to Clarice and said: "Your loving brother, eh?"

"Wouldn't Billy know?"

"Any one could fill Billy with any yarn so long as they gave him plenty of liquor to keep it down. Poor Billy, he takes after your grandfather, my dear."

"He's wild, mother, but his heart's all right."

"I'm glad to hear that," she said, thinking of the years when Billy's heart was in the keeping of two ladies, one in London, the other in Paris, who cost him about fifteen thousand pounds in twelve months.

Clarice was then about ten years old. She did not know much about Billy.

"Still, Ed might have told me. It's not nice of him to let me——" she stopped suddenly.

"Let you what?"

"Well, the last time I went into Minsterley—with Cricket—I met the archdeacon, and he—well he upset me——"

"What did he say?"

"He sneered when I told him about Ed and the Victoria Cross. He said Ed's dad had tremendous influence."

"So he has. But ten thousand such dads couldn't get the cross for a son if he hadn't a right to it. Look here, Clarice, you've let this thing get on your nerves, or else you wouldn't let a jabbering old beetle like the archdeacon upset you. You ought to know there's a set in this county which loathes Sir Alfred and all his lot. Evie is persona grata. She is hall-marked. But Sir Alfred and his lads are not liked. Don't be alarmed. It's only because the Horton-Birketts are rich enough to buy half this county's families. That's it. When they took Crowington our lot tried to get me to join a clique against them, but I wouldn't touch it with tongs. It failed because most of the men who started it found after a bit Sir Alfred was an easy mark for small investments and I. O. U's. Well the church nobs at Minsterley got hold of that wooden-headed Harold and made a parson of him. I don't think there was much in him anyway, but that settled it. Little girl, I'm getting on, and I've seen a lot in my time. You take mother's tip and think things out for yourself. And don't be

a fool about Ed. In an age like this it's a blessing to know a man that doesn't talk much."

Clarice was learning some history about the neighborhood and her friends. It grieved her deeply to hear her mother speak so severely of the archdeacon.

"But surely Ed will try to clear himself."

"Try, of course, he will. If they give him the chance. If!"

"He did say there was nothing to be ashamed of."

"Did he? Then you have no reason to worry."

"And yet he has not got the cross yet."

"He hasn't been up to town."

"He doesn't seem to want it."

"Well, your father didn't think much of medals, and you know how many he had. All I got out of the South African War was a couple of pieces of metal, when, with decent medical attention and food, I should have got your father back again. Men who have had a dose of the British War Office at work, don't think medals compensate for its everlasting blundering and incompetency."

Lady Clungford picked up a picture paper, kicked her slippers off and settled down to read herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Evelyn's child was born a new difficulty arose. What was to be done about the parentage of it? Its birth had to be registered. The more the family council discussed the question the worse the dilemma appeared. Evelyn never departed from her intention of simply registering the facts. And in the end her wish was carried out. Count Herbert Von Holst was recorded father of the child. Ed attended to the business. When the question of baptism came up another council debated for several days without success. Ed said he would rather the child never had water in its life than be baptized by Harold. Ellen was dead against the church in or out of the county. In the end Tonks' Chapel was chosen. Ellen went to see Mr. Bagnell, the minister, and he said he would be glad to baptize it. When Harold heard of it he was angry, and said unkind things about the children of Huns.

Then life for Evelyn was made unbearable. A craftily planned agitation began with anonymous postcards addressed to the Countess Von Holst, Wilmslow Lodge. The servants were pestered too. One day a man left a package containing a German helmet. Through the post Evelyn received clippings from newspapers recording great slaughter of German armies. The campaign was ably conducted. The post-marks were from the towns within a radius

of twenty miles. Some of the servants left, unable to bear the jeers of those serving at one or two houses in the neighborhood. Clarice was not forgotten. Some one sent her a note asking if she were godmother to the little Hun.

Then a weekly paper famous for its patriotism, and the businesslike traits of its editor, printed a story of the doing of Count Herbert Von Holst, "the spy in the pay of the Kaiser." The story left nothing to the imagination of the paper's readers. The editor, knowing the intelligence of his readers, could not risk lowering the circulation by doing such a thing. It is needless to say that edition of the paper sold well for many miles round about Minsterley. The news agent in Crowington received an extra quantity that week, and was told to bill it for all he was worth.

The story was an exceptionally fine example of the literature which the war "leaders of thought" sold weekly to a large section of the British public. It was remarkable inasmuch as the writer was accurate as to Von Holst's full name, the date of his birth, his school, his university, and the names of his houses in town and in the country. There accuracy came to an untimely end. The rest was as bankrupt of truth as an atheist is when he says he believes God will defend the right. Numbers of the issue were sent to Evelyn. Ed was too late to keep a copy from her. He saw the contents bill in the village, jumped back into the car and told Barnes to drive "all out" for Wilmslow. When he got there Evelyn was on her bed, "raving." They got her to Crowington where she was very ill for some weeks.

When Sir Alfred heard of what had happened to Evelyn, he felt, for a moment, like giving up making shells to kill enemies abroad and devoting his attention to making combustibles to destroy the enemies at home. He had had a lively time at the War Office about Ed, and told them what he thought of Jawton. He threatened to raise the question in the House and publish the facts (which he did not possess) in every paper which he could influence. His outburst scared an under-secretary and alarmed a permanent secretary, but only for an hour or two. After lunch the secretaries, under and permanent, forgot there was such a person as Sir Alfred Horton-Birkett.

Ben read the article on Von Holst. It was so utterly grotesque he could not refrain from laughing outright. To think there were hundreds of thousands of readers in Britain who believed that kind of story, was to him a mockery of common sense. And when he thought of the editor of the paper, that his own son-in-law was the son of a dear old German Jew merchant of respect and high standing in the city, he wondered what some creatures would not do for a living. But Britain was at war! And there was money to be made by giving the scared section of the public what it desired. Much as Ben disliked the whole crew of Bernhardis, Treitschkes, and Bismarcks, he vowed they did less real harm than the gang of British journalists who thrive on such stuff as that about Von Holst. Ben had not then heard how the article affected Evelyn. At that time he was busy getting out his pamphlet called *To Conscientious Objectors*. It was an exposure of the

methods of recruiting, and an analysis of the social and legal position of those who conscientiously object to taking part in war. The pamphlet went like wildfire all over the north of England and Wales. Ben and his pamphlet were dealt with severely in the newspapers. He was called pro-German, traitor, lunatic, scoundrel. A great peer wrote to the papers and wanted to know if there was a law in the land, if there was a government equal to dealing with such people and so on. Evidently there was. Copies of Ben's pamphlet were taken away from the publishers and burned. The type was broken up. And the working men of England and Wales were freed from the terrible influence of Benjamin Tonks, the pro-German.

The stir made by Ben's pamphlet affected Sir Alfred in a peculiar way. He was in the House when Mr. Panderton put his question to the home secretary on the "disastrous effect" the pamphlet had on recruiting in certain areas. The attorney-general replied and informed the House that he was giving the matter his serious consideration. The member who asked a supplementary question as to what lengths the Government desired to go in suppressing "free speech," was called a traitor and told to "shut up." Sir Alfred decided to keep quiet and let justice take its course. The incident however upset him for the day. He had hoped he would be able to put in a word for his son-in-law, just to show Ellen that he had some spirit left. There was not a line in the pamphlet he took objection to, indeed it was just the kind of thing he would have written—or spoken—when he was Ben's age. It was all in line with his

sentiments on the position of non-conformists of fifty years ago. When he met Ellen at Horton House he felt mean.

"I couldn't get in, Ellen," he said. "The speaker did not call on me."

"Did any one protest in the name of free speech?"

"Isleworth said something, but he was told to shut up."

"The emasculated Commons!" she said, sinking into a chair. It stung her father; he winced as if a hornet had nipped him on his fat neck.

Ellen did not wait for tea. She left him with the *St. Stephen's Gazette*. For some time he sat turning its pages over, too disgruntled to read the columns his eyes were skimming. When he was quite conscious of what he was seeing he found himself in the middle of an article on "Recruiting," and in it a severe criticism of Ben's pamphlet. The writer granted it was a perfectly correct statement of the position of conscientious objectors to war, but it was not the time to assist our enemies by putting precise ethical and legal notions into the minds of men who were required for the trenches. In such a war we all had to sacrifice some principles, the writer went on to say, and no lover of his country would hesitate to sacrifice his wealth, his life, his all, at such a crisis. Britain was fighting for liberty, free institutions, against Prussian arrogance and oppression.

Sir Alfred saw it all as plain as a pike-staff. The position was perfectly clear. Ben was mistaken. Of course he had no intention of assisting Prussia, not the slightest, but he was bound to make a sacrifice,

and that he had not done. It was not the time for that kind of a pamphlet.

In the news columns he read of the awful methods the Germans were adopting to break through the western lines. There had been a dreadful battle in which the enemy had used asphyxiating shells with deadly effect. The news was harrowing. It shocked Sir Alfred so terribly that he determined to see Ellen and ask her if such an act was to be forgiven. After the years he had devoted to the business of making warfare as humane as possible, after all his work in connection with the Hague Conferences, it was nothing less than a reversion to barbarism! Frightfulness was the word for it. Asphyxiating shells used against a Christian country! It was more than a civilized people could stand. Only a godless bureaucracy could think of doing such a thing. Well, if Britain were to be beaten by such methods, defeat would be preferable to victory obtained by resorting to them. The news of the German use of asphyxiating bombs infused new life into him, and he went about his work after that with fresh vigor.

At the House that evening he found a note from the mother of Major Pomeroy-Fanton saying her son had returned from the hospital in France and would like to see him if he could spare the time to run down to the New Forest where she had taken a house for the wounded man to recuperate. Sir Alfred wired saying he would go down the next day. He left word to be called early the next morning. When his man brought the tea and the papers he was not refreshed; he had turned and tossed out of one dream into another the whole night. He sat up and

sipped the tea, stupidly blinking at the rays of the sun aslant the foot of the bed.

The train was moving when he scrambled into it at Waterloo. It was some time before he settled down. He remembered his motor had been held up by a large body of troops passing through Parliament Square to Victoria Station. A man who stood near the window of his car during the block spoke to a young clergyman. The conversation riveted Sir Alfred's attention though he kept his eye on the carriage clock ticking away in front of him.

"Another lot goin' to be massacred," the man said, with a nod at the passing regiment.

"Oh, no," the clergyman returned sharply. "Not massacred, certainly not. We shall soon pay the Huns back in their own coin, you see."

"They're goin' to be massacred all the same."

"Still, they'll give a very good account of themselves."

"So did my two sons—both dead."

"Really! Sorry!"

"You oughter see our 'ouse. My youngest brother both feet gone, and a son-in-law with only one 'and."

"Very sad." The clergyman shook himself. "Fine body of men!" he exclaimed, craning his neck to get a glimpse of the last lot.

"Goin' to be massacred."

While the train sped on through Surbiton and Woking Sir Alfred thought of the man who doggedly held to the belief that the troops were "goin' to be massacred." Basingstoke was passed before he picked up the paper. A long article on "Gas,"

written by a well-known Radical, caught his eye. It was a protest against the suggestion that Britain should set to work at once to manufacture asphyxiating shells. The writer hoped the authorities would not listen to any such horrible suggestion. Sir Alfred heartily agreed. It was monstrous to think of such a thing. We should deserve the contempt of all neutral nations if we stooped to the methods of German frightfulness; of that he was firmly convinced. He turned the pages of the paper over indolently and felt the reaction of a bad night and busy morning working upon him. His eyes were heavy. Suddenly he sat up, readjusted his glasses, and stared at the paper. He dropped it slowly, and hid his face in his hands. In the list of casualties he had seen the name of Captain Robert Horton-Birkett among the wounded. A faintness came over him. The train rushed on, the country swam by on both sides, giving him the sensation of being thrown violently into the air. His stomach rebelled.

The short drive in the car to the major's house revived him, though he was weak and trembly when he arrived. Major Pomeroy-Fanton lay on a couch on wheels. There he would lie perhaps for the rest of his life. His wounds were permanent, troublesome and would require the attention of a nurse every day and night. Sir Alfred had seen him only once before—in the hospital, but he knew from Ed he was a tall man of fine physique and great strength. What he now saw was a grotesque parody of Ed's description of him.

"I wanted to see you about Ed," the major said, in a voice that seemed to Sir Alfred as if it came

out of a deep cavern. "I left France about six weeks ago but the journey nearly did for me. Now I'm a bit better I thought mother might drop you a line. It's good of you to come down."

He spoke slowly, almost a precise accent was given to each syllable, as if he wished to make quite sure of one word before he ventured on another.

"I know how Ed feels, at least I think I do. It is hard lines. Very. But what can be done? Only one order came down to us that day, and that was countermanded. Jawton, however, still sticks to it he sent an order to advance at five. Even if we had received that order it would have been too late. Reserve orders are mostly like that. It has been so from the beginning in this affair. Really we were badly cut up before the men broke and rushed forward. Before I left France I was told none of the officers of the reserve received the order Jawton says was given. I want you to tell that to Ed, but you are not to mention my name. I'm not up to having any trouble about it. We all know Jawton is in the wrong. When the commander heard about Ed carrying me and Tudor out of the mess, he acted spontaneously in recommending him for the Victoria Cross. He didn't consult Jawton, who damned and blasted everybody for a week when he heard of it, but took no action. That was the test. It is only influence that keeps Jawton where he is. Ed knows his crowd. The lot that would massacre armies rather than change their old methods of fighting."

Sir Alfred thought of the man who said the troops were "goin' to be massacred."

He thought of Robert.

"There's too much tittle-tattle going on, too much pushing and pulling, with a certain set. There's enough jealousy at the front to stock all the women's clubs in the kingdom. And here at home one section is free to damn good soldiers who are victims of bad 'uns while press criticism of the War Office is frowned upon as rank treason. If the House of Commons knew a tenth of what is going on at the front the members would go mad."

Going back to town Sir Alfred pondered the question of responsibility. Was it right of members to hand over blindly the fate of millions of men to the Government? Was it right to connive at a policy of downright deception? Were men sent out by hundreds of thousands to be massacred? And what of the section that was free to damn good soldiers who were the victims of bad ones? What section was it? When he thought of how his own family had suffered, and was suffering, he broke into a hot sweat. But what was there to be done? Parliament was impotent. Sir Alfred knew he could do nothing. Any question put in the House would be received with suspicion, or answered by a grieved minister in such a way as to side-track the matter. The prospect was hopeless. There was no one to speak for the men and their company officers. The lists each day might tell the tale of scores of Britain's finest young men slaughtered, but there was on one to ask if the sacrifice was necessary. Martial rule in the country and martial rule in the Commons, subdued all serious criticism. The Government was supreme; the voice of the people was not heard.

There was a telegram from Robert waiting at

Horton House. He had received slight wounds in the arm and neck, but nothing to cause anxiety. Sir Alfred was relieved. He had thought of going over to France that night. It would have been inconvenient to leave England at that time for there were persistent rumors about that there would be a change of Government. The reports from the front that some one had blundered in not providing the requisite shells was a matter of great concern to Sir Alfred.

Shortly after the change of Government Sir Alfred was called upon to lay down new plants in many places and find new machinery for making shells. In a few weeks a revolution took place in the methods of the industry. It came about in a strange way. Sir Alfred was almost at his wit's end, as to how he could answer the demands of the authorities, when he was asked by his manager to see an American inventor who had been kicking his heels about the War Office and some of the big plants in the north, for several months, without making any impression.

"My machinery can give you the same amount of shells as the French get out of my machines," Mr. McLeod said, "and our machines turn out most of the shells for the French seventy-five gun."

"Do the War Office people know that?" Sir Alfred asked.

"Oh, yes. If they have opened my letters yet."

"Can you supply me with a large number of machines?"

"A very large number."

A cable was sent off at once to Mr. McLeod's works. Then the American told Sir Alfred some of

his experiences in trying to rouse British munition-makers to a better understanding of the position. It was really a story of the crass stupidity of men wedded to antiquated methods. Here Mr. McLeod was snubbed, there he was laughed at, somewhere else he was regarded with suspicion. But at the War Office he did not even get the satisfaction of being noticed, let alone snubbed.

"You're at least eight months too late, Sir Alfred," he said. "If you had gone to work on modern methods when the French did your spring offensive would have borne some practical results, and you would have saved tens of thousands of lives perhaps. Now I'm afraid it's going to be a long drawn out affair. Well, it can't be helped now, but it's a thousand pities to see the very flower of Britain's youth slaughtered out there—and all for the want of practical men at the head of affairs. I'm an engineer and a maker of shell machinery, but I tell you I hate to see the bonny lads going out to face German science and German organization without an equal chance when the guns go off."

"You're right, Mr. McLeod. It is not fair."

"Now the thing is to get it over as quickly as possible."

The phrase stuck in Sir Alfred's mind. Get it over as quickly as possible, yes, that was the most humane thing to do.

"If you had known of my machinery in the middle of last July, and had got to work at once, most of your difficulties would have been over by now. Aye, it's a pity. In this department you're all fifty years behind the time. And yet you come to

us for machinery for boots, and cloth, and printing, and a hundred other things. You never thought of bringing your machinery of making shells up to date. Aye—think of it.”

“But such a concern as mine could not take the initiative, Mr. McLeod. We supply the War Office according to its orders. They tell us what they want, and we make it. If we had got your plant it is quite possible the authorities would not have even tried one of your shells.”

“Just so. Just so. But Sir Alfred your German connection——”

Sir Alfred winced, turned mottled red, and then white to the lips. He fidgeted about with a paper knife, and picked the palm of his hand. Mr. McLeod shrewdly noticed the effect of his remarks, and went on.

“Your German connection is making a grand shell. The other day in France I saw one which was captured in a trench. It hadn’t been used. It was perfect. The French artillerists told me they are awful missiles to come in a shower. They can plow through anything. Well, I think I can help you to turn out just as good a shell. But the thing is to get it over as quickly as possible.”

For many weeks after the interview with Mr. McLeod, Sir Alfred was far too busy to go down to Crowington. Having given Horton House over to the authorities for a nursing home, he took a room at the club and lived the gloomy days in an atmosphere of depressing political respectability.

CHAPTER XIII

DURING the weeks when Evelyn lay sick at Crowington her mother spent many lonely hours in which she surveyed the past. Though Evelyn's child brought some happy moments to her, it often enough reminded her of the years when her own children were left to the care of nurses and pedagogues, while she devoted herself chiefly to social and political affairs. Ambition drove her into "the swim," there to find opportunities of advancement. Early in her married life she realized the limitations of Alfred. She knew he would not be of any use to her social aspiration, that he would find all his pleasure in industrial achievement, and rely on the Government to reward patient merit, and large subscriptions to party funds when, and how they wished. Besides, he was a strenuous dissenter, a leader of the English movement against the Established Church. His simple origin, too, was not in her favor. She had, however, enjoyed the struggle carrying such an impost to victory. Alfred had given them riches, but she had brought them distinction.

When she surveyed the wondrous past and thought of the social, political and financial gain, she found the loss of family love and cohesion outweigh all the advantages on which she had placed so much store. It was so strange to her that the war should be the means of revealing all the shortcomings of her domestic affairs. Her marriage had been a partner-

ship: Alfred's money and business ability united to her poverty and social standing. The partnership was a success. But when all the short-lived tendernesses were counted up had there been love in their married life? Good as he was, easy-going, seldom ill-tempered—even for a moment—he was, after all, that kind of man who can live without love so long as the necessary woman is there when she is required. Perhaps, if they had suffered reverses in the early years, fine gold might have been found in Alfred. Reverses were not for them, however, and success carried them smoothly along the road of monotonous respectability. She wondered if with fewer children it might have been different.

And her sons and daughters. She had known for a long time they had not much love for their father. He was not a lovable father. When they were little he seldom saw them. She could not remember when he visited the nursery. Yet he was the most indulgent father she had ever heard of; indeed, he had always let them do just as they wished. When Ed said he would like to go into the army, his father made no objection, though she knew he had hoped Ed would go into the business. When Harold chose the church for his career, his father never said a word against it. (That was an omission Harold never forgave him.) As for the girls, she knew they did not care whether their father existed or not. Ellen looked good-humoredly upon him as a political nobody, a religious hypocrite, an industrial charlatan and an artistic noodle. Evelyn always kept out of his way though he provided her with every luxury. He loved them both in his dull expressionless way. He loved

them all, but he was bereft of lovable means of demonstration. They saw only the material generosity of their father, which to them was large enough to cover a multitude of parental deficiencies.

When Lady Horton-Birkett thought of how the children stood to one another she derived no satisfaction. They all despised Harold, the one she had placed so much faith in. Robert scarcely knew them since he joined the army. He seldom came home. Fred had been away for the most part of eight years at school and the university. Ed was the only boy who showed the slightest affection for his parents and his home. Ellen and Evelyn did care for Ed; there was something strong about him.

So the war in some strange way threw a searchlight on the family and brought out all the gains and losses of their lives. And in those hours, when she, alone in the silent house, surveyed the past there seemed so little gained for all the expenditure of labor and care that what was left of life seemed scarcely worth desiring.

Twelve miles to the southeast of Crowington stood an old town remarkable for its Norman church and Elizabethan cottages. There were some hundred Irish people in its community, and tucked away in a very quiet and beautiful lane there stood a Catholic chapel, built by a rich landlord at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Lady Horton-Birkett had been over visiting a sick relative in that neighborhood when she met the village priest. And he it was who persuaded her to view the chapel. There she found calm. Often after that first visit she went over to it and got the sexton to let her in, and

now every Sunday she went heavily veiled to mass. At first it was a change, something during the week to look forward to, having all the interest of clandestine pleasure, with no risk to her, and no harm to her family. No one knew her in the community save the priest, and he would keep her secret. When summer came she went farther afield and visited some of the well-known Catholic communities in North Wales. Her interest increased. One day after a visit to Holywell she found Ellen at Crowington. Her daughter had come from town to spend a week or two with the Tonkses in the village.

"Do you believe in God, Ellen?" she asked, after a chat about Harold.

"Yes, of course, I do. What a funny thing to ask."

"Do you? Really?"

"Yes, mater. Why?"

"But you never go to any church."

"No, certainly not. And what's that go to do with a belief in God?"

"Ellen! Isn't a church the temple of God?"

"Mater! What nonsense! The body is the temple of God. The soul is the shrine. The kingdom of God is within you. Nowhere else. You might as well say a house is a home. Is it?"

"It is where a home should be," her mother sighed.

"True. But why did you ask me if I believed in God?" Ellen asked curiously.

"Well, dear, I have not been happy lately, and somehow I have got out of the habit of going to our church here."

"I don't wonder. You've found out God is not there. Just as years ago I found out our house was not a home. As we've all found out. So you've come to your senses at last."

"Don't be unkind——"

"I shan't be sentimental, mater."

"I thought you were an atheist, Ellen."

"I know you did. Father thinks so, too. An atheist! Because I don't go to church! It is too silly. It is almost as stupid as saying some English people are traitors because they do not support this Government. Well, anyway, I'm glad you have got out of the habit of going to church. Now you'll probably be a happier woman."

"Are you happy, Ellen?"

"Happy?" Her eyes shone with gladness. She clasped her hands in pure delight. "I never dreamed of such happiness."

"I'm so glad, dear. Kiss me, Ellen."

She kissed her mother warmly, and said: "I'm going to be a mother."

How different! she thought. But then Ellen was so unlike them all. She seemed to have come from another stock. Perhaps her father's mother was the strain from which Ellen derived.

Ed and Ellen had tea in Evelyn's room. The invalid was improving, but she was not strong enough to get down-stairs. The baby thrived apace and delighted its mother every day with acrobatic exhibitions of linking its fingers and toes. It rolled about on the bed crooning and howling every afternoon for an hour while Evelyn made the sound of the

cricket, which made the baby laugh until it hiccupped. She worried a good deal about Wilmslow, and harried Ed daily as to the condition of the place and the care of the hunters. The horses were sent to a farm on the Crowington estate. Ed dare not sell them. Evelyn believed the war would soon come to an end, and Herbert would come back. She would listen to no suggestion that would entail parting with anything Herbert left there.

"How long do you think it will last, Ed?"

"Don't know. Another year, maybe. It may depend on the Dardanelles and the Balkans. Seems to me from what can be gathered from our papers, the Russian line, and the French, too, won't affect the end very much. The winning or losing of a trench or two here or there can make little difference. Peace might come soon after Germany gets through the Balkans to the Black Sea. That's my opinion."

"Ben's opinion is something like that," Ellen remarked.

"How's Robert getting on?" Evelyn asked.

"Quite all right. He's much better and says he'll be ready to go back very soon," Ed said.

"It's monstrous, the way they're flinging wounded men back again," Ellen put in. "Very few get the chance of making a thorough mental and physical recovery. It's horrible."

Then followed the usual silence after a reference to the slaughter while they examined their thoughts.

"And dad—what's he doing?" Ed asked, after a long pause.

"Coining money. He's got a lot of American ma-

chinery which turns out shells faster than a machine-gun can make corpses. He's in high feather."

"What's he think of the Coalition Scramble Stakes?"

"Oh, he's sick about it. Just think of dad having to support a Cabinet half made up of the other lot. But he gets over it by saying it is his sacrifice."

"He is a joke," Evelyn muttered. "And Haughmond? Is that attended to?"

"Yes, all ready," Ellen replied. "You tell him."

"No, you, little 'un."

"Well, all right."

Ellen looked at Ed for a moment or two and wondered how he would take it.

"Sit down, Ed, I've something to tell you."

Ed sat on the edge of the bed and looked across it at Ellen.

"You know that Haughmond land in Dorset old aunty left to mother?"

"Yes. What's up?"

"It's yours."

"Mine."

"Yes. Evelyn and I have left it to you."

He was puzzled. "How left it—"

"Mater turned it over to us, and we turned it over to you. Don't you see?"

"But what for?"

"Well, we thought you might like something of your own to fall back on. It's nearly two thousand a year."

"But I've got my pay."

"Stupid, you can't keep Clarice on your pay."

"Clarice has eighty thousand pounds," Evelyn interjected.

"Thunder and lightning, I didn't know that," Ellen exclaimed.

"Never mind that," Ed said. "Why have you girls given the Haughmond place to me?"

They cast glances at each other, stammered alternately a syllable and got no further. Ed eyed them both with an amused expression.

"Out with it," he ordered.

"Well—because—Ed, it was—because we thought you didn't want any money coming from munitions," Ellen blurted.

"Yes, that's it, Ed," Evelyn put in emphatically.

He had felt that was their reason for doing it.

"Aren't you glad?" Evelyn inquired.

"Better take dad's hoard than your bit," he mused.

"Our bit! I'm provided for, Ed," Evelyn said.

"And Ben can earn all I want," Ellen asserted.

"Look here, girls. I've thought of all this since I came back, thought of it no end, and there's no way out for us. I'm not good at moralizing, as you know, and preaching's not my line, but I've made up my mind to start afresh when this war's over. I know about gees, and that's about all. So I'm going to breed hunters. Good, clean, brave, healthy horses—"

"And Clarice—"

He was struck dumb and stared hopelessly at them for a while. His eyes told them he was hurt, and that his silence meant an inward struggle to control an emotion that pained him. They were too moved

by his eyes full of suffering to speak and turn the subject.

"She mightn't want to begin afresh," he muttered. "It would not be fair to ask that. Would it, now?"

"But—but, Ed—listen!" Ellen cried. "Haughmond is yours, and you must have it. That's settled. You needn't take a penny of dad's money. Evelyn and I will not want for anything. Remember, I kept myself for years in Germany, and I can always get a job as a musician. Now, you must be sensible. Do, Ed."

"You'll want it, you see," he muttered. "The war's not over yet, and you never can tell. It's awfully good of you, but it won't do."

"How are you going to breed hunters without money?" Evelyn asked sharply, exasperated by his refusal.

"Don't know yet. You see, I'm good at nothing much, and that's the only thing I really know about. I can't do any more soldiering."

He held up his right hand, and waved it, as if he were sweeping that career out of his path.

"Don't, Ed," Evelyn cried beseechingly.

"Anyway, I've made up my mind I'm going to start afresh. Perhaps I'll make a poor beginning. I can't tell yet. If dad were ruined through it, suppose he lost all his money in the end, then I'd have to work for my living—"

"If he were ruined!" Ellen murmured. "I wish for his own sake that might happen. No such luck."

"In any event I mean to go on my own."

"But not all of dad's money has been made from shells and armaments," Evelyn remembered.

"I know. But that makes no difference, Cricket. In a case like this there's no choice. It's all or nothing."

"You're right, Ed—absolutely," Ellen exclaimed.

The chat in Evelyn's room had a great effect on Ed. For several days he wandered about the fields of Crowington wrestling in his ponderously slow manner with the weighty questions he had to decide. Soldiering had done for him. From the moment he met Herbert face to face in battle, and heard his wild cry for his love, for Cricket, Ed cared no more what happened to him. It was his desire to end it all that sent him back into that hail of bullets for Pomeroy-Fanton and Tudor. Life at that price was not worth living. But he lived through it. Unlike so many young men, driven by the methods of recruiting advertisements and orators to the front to find relief in "suicide" from the curse of blood, he had fought gallantly since the beginning. "Suicide" had not occurred to him. He was a soldier by profession. To be shot and not shoot was never in his mind. Indeed "suicide" was not known until long after he was back in England. The quarrel with Jawton had made no difference; it was the shock of meeting Herbert. It amazed Ed when he remembered how much he thought about in that moment. With incalculable rapidity he suffered such thoughts as "I might have killed him," and "Why him?" and "Why any man?" Herbert he knew and loved. But there was not a German in all that wild battle he had cause to hate or personal desire to kill. The man he struck down at Herbert's feet was

perhaps obeying Herbert's orders, perhaps actually defending Herbert at that moment.

Ellen had worked wonders in Ed she knew not of. While he was lying in his mother's parlor his sister brought to him some Tolstoy tracts. He read these works in the hours when he was alone, but never spoke to any one about them. Ellen thought he had not looked at them, as he never mentioned them. One day she brought *War and Peace* to him and told him to read it. He made no promise, however; but at night, and when he was well enough to go about, he read it with deep interest. This work, too, he mentioned to no one. So Ellen in that way brought about a complete change in Ed's views of life. And all the time in his rambles, and at night, he was eating his heart out for Clarice. He knew the stories of his cowardice had affected her in some way. She did not come over, and she did not send messages. Though they lived only a few miles apart they did not meet, for Ed went seldom to the village, and now Evelyn was at Crowington, he kept away from Wilmslow. The sense of misunderstanding possessed Ed and Clarice more sharply than if they had quarreled. And the position of his family made him feel he should spare Clarice from the ill-will of their neighbors. He and Evelyn were lepers and it were better for their friends isolation should be complete. How dreary the time was for him. How much a prisoner he felt within the bounds of the estate. He became so familiar with every field that the place seemed to shrink smaller and smaller every day. If his hand were only well enough to begin riding! It was healing now, but it had been an ob-

stinate wound, and the three fingers left on his hand felt numb, as if they would be of no use to him. He was, however, making progress with left-hand writing, and he was reading more than he ever did before.

Ben had promised to spend Minsterley Flower Show week with Ellen at his father's house. She wanted to go one day to the show in commemoration of their first meeting years ago. Evelyn placed her car at their disposal. It was a lovely August day when they left Crowington to ride in to Minsterley. The show was, however, shorn of much of its popular interest owing to abandonment of side-shows, but the flowers and fruits were every bit as fine as in the days of peace. In the afternoon Ellen and Ben called on an aunt, the old woman who met the wounded Tommy the night Ed returned from the French hospital.

"It's good a thee to come," old Mrs. Vaughan said, as she got tea ready for her guests. "We'm not used to gran' folks, but tha's welcome, surely. Albert 'Enry's gone back to trenches, 'e 'as, poor lad, these five weeks. Gone afore 'e was ready and willin', I'm thinkin'. 'E's last of all mine as they took. Bill war killed early on, Jim 'e died in 'orspital, John Griffith 'e war blown ta atoms on 'is ship. Three jead outer five. T'other—Robertson—'e's consumptive and not able."

"Where are the girls, aunt?" Ben asked.

"They'm married. Three 'as childer in war. I anna 'eard as anys killed yet. Praised be God for them mercies. 'E's seen fit to take my three, 'E 'as. I mun bear up if it be 'Is wish."

Mrs. Vaughan shed few tears. She went busily about her work, and laid before them tea, scones, hot muffins, apple jelly and eggs. Everything was beautifully clean. It was an inviting meal.

"Have you been to Crowington lately?" Ellen asked.

"No, ma'am. It's a bit of a journey for me. I anna bin there for nigh on ten years. It war good o' your mother—'er ladyship—to come in and see Albert 'Enry. 'E war fair set up about it. 'Er's good to me. Praise be to God."

Later that evening when Ellen and Ben were riding back to Crowington, Ben, after a long silence in which he thought of his aunt, said:

"It's lucky for the men called a Government that the true non-conformist mothers of England really believe it's God's will."

CHAPTER XIV

THE Registration Act caused much excitement at Crowington Manor, and the question of who should distribute the papers to the villagers raised considerable discussion. There were numbers of nosey people in the district who were willing to undertake the job. Harold and his friends welcomed the measure; but Ed and Ellen were opposed to the act and would have nothing to do with it. Ben said it was the last thing in Prussian interference, and that it would bring the people shortly under the lash of the conscriptionists. The discussion which took place on the Sunday evening was heated and, before it came to an end, some hard words passed.

"I think Harold wants to distribute the papers," Sir Alfred said, by way of testing the feeling of the meeting.

"Not Harold," Ed began.

"Why not——?" his father put in.

"He's a conscriptionist. It wouldn't be fair."

"Quite against the spirit of the promise of the Government that the act was not a bridge for the conscriptionists," Ellen remarked.

"But Harold knows all the people. He is vicar," Sir Alfred said testily.

"And can bulldoze some of them to his heart's desire," Evelyn snorted.

"Well, the schoolmaster——" her father suggested.

"No. He's Harold's tool."

"But, Ed, some one must do it."

"Then you do it, dad."

"No, no," Lady Horton-Birkett cried. "Dad must not do it. It would not look nice going from door to door like a rent collector."

"But he is one, mater," Ellen observed.

"Dad would be fair about it," Ed said, with a tone of finality.

Sir Alfred felt flattered for a moment, but all the same he did not like the job. It was undignified. Still, he had never seen the majority of his tenants to speak to, and it might give him an opportunity of thanking each household for what it had done for the empire.

"Has any one found out how many men have gone to the front from our village?" he asked.

"Yes, I have the figures," Ellen answered. She took out of her bag a note-book and turned its pages. "Up to the end of May: two hundred and three houses; fifty-two enlistments, nine killed and thirty wounded. A month ago there were eleven totally disabled men at home. One house—the Millingtons—lost two boys under eighteen, who enlisted by giving wrong ages, the father is wounded and totally disabled. The mother is in the lunatic asylum and Jennie, the eldest daughter, not sixteen yet, has four under fourteen to look after. Then there's——"

"Ellen, Ellen, for God's sake stop," her mother cried, "I can't stand it." She burst into tears.

"It is fiendish, isn't it?" she observed. "I thought dad would like to know before he distributed the papers. Here are my notes." She handed the book to her father. "You might care to look them over.

You'll find there how many women there are over sixteen and under sixty-five for the purposes of the Act."

"Our village has given its share," Ed muttered.

"How many men gone from the estate are killed and wounded?" Evelyn inquired.

"From the estate, four of our men enlisted; two gardeners, a groom and a chauffeur. A gardener, Evans, is wounded, and Vance, the groom, died of fever," Ed replied. "We have only three men left here and they are over fifty—the boys are under fifteen."

"Well, when Fred goes, there will be only Harold left to enlist," Evelyn sighed.

"A little work in France might make him modify his views on conscription," Ellen insinuated. "A few weeks at the front might do him a lot of good."

"Must these registration papers be distributed, dad?" Ed asked.

"Most certainly. Why do you ask?"

"It seems to me an insulting thing to do down here. Surely the village can do no more. Who is left? The women can't be spared; the children and the farms must be looked after. I went into the matter pretty carefully last week, and I'm blest if I can see what good will be done here by delivering registration forms. If it must be done—then you should do it, dad. It's a ticklish business and must be done carefully."

"You're quite right, Ed—quite right," his father said. "I will do it myself."

Ellen sat near her mother and inwardly fumed with anger at her father's sublime indifference to the

woe that affected nearly every cottage in the village. She had hoped he would express some word of sorrow, that he would show some sympathy. She hoped in vain. To her he seemed to be hypnotized by any order issued by the Government. His servility was complete. She did not know he had qualms as to the dignity of the proceeding. She judged him by his appearances. So smug and aloof he seemed as he listened to their arguments, that she began to regard him as a stranger wholly ignorant of the facts. Or was it the cursed spell of "Government" which subdued every bit of pity in him? And this man was once a Radical. Ellen wondered if it were not a myth; the story of his youth and his fight for disestablishment and religious liberty. He reminded her of a Prussian official who read out a list of killed to a group of old men and women in a village on the borders of Saxony. He went on reading in sharp steely tones, never heeding the grief of the listeners. Then when he had spoken the last name he turned to a colleague and told a bawdy story to the accompaniment of loud guffaws. Ellen thought indifference could not be more complete.

"If you deliver the forms here I'll never speak to you again," she said, rising and going to her father, who had lighted a cigar and was playing with the almost burned match.

The attack was so unexpected he dropped his cigar: "What!"

"I mean it. If you stoop to such a contemptible act as to hand a registration form into any cottage in the village, I'll never speak to you again."

Her eyes sparkled with anger. Her frail body seemed to grow as she stood before the huge bulk of her father.

"Ellen—I—I can't understand," he stammered.

"Can't understand! Have you lost all sense of refinement? Is there no limit to which you will go like an old sheep so long as the Government leads the way?"

Lady Horton-Birkett left the room.

"But the law of the land——"

"You know that is not so. Law of the land! And since when have you accepted laws the land has had no part in making? You've destroyed the laws of the land. Every law worth having is gone—abolished—abandoned."

"But only for the duration of the war."

He looked for all the world like a great big dunce in a village school blurting out wrong answers to simple questions put by an impatient teacher.

"Nonsense! You would find a pretext for any enormity as long as the Government committed it. You think these abominable laws have only to be put into force when they are passed by a gagged House. You never think of the pain, the sorrow they will bring. You talk about fighting to save Christianity when you ought to know it doesn't exist. You prate about democracy when you know the war killed its only chance to rise. You ask men raised in pig pens, called cottages, to go and be slaughtered for western civilization. And you have the amazing impertinence to associate God with all your hellish proceedings. When was God not used as a cloak for national sins? You cram the papers full of lies.

You can't bare to tell the truth about defeat and losses, and you foist petty advances on humbugged people as war-ending victories."

The others were struck dumb by Ellen's outburst. They were too amazed to intercede or restrain. To see little Ellen hurling denunciation into her humiliated father's face was a fascinating sight and riveted their attention as would a dramatically acted scene on the stage. It was so grippingly interesting they did not realize their relations to the actors. When Ellen, breathless, stopped speaking they looked to their father to reply, but he turned away with a sad shrug of his big shoulders and sank into his arm-chair. Whether that action of his was interpreted by Ellen as one of contempt for her censure it set her almost in a flame.

"Can nothing stir you out of your indifference?" she cried, stamping her foot and turning toward him. "Are you so immersed in making shells and money that pity can't touch you?"

"Some one has to make shells, and they can't be made for nothing," he retorted angrily, stung at last to show temper.

Ed suddenly realized it was not wise for Ellen to work herself into such a passion.

"Come, Ellen, be quiet now," he said, taking her arm. "Evelyn, come, take her away."

Evelyn put her arm around her sister, who broke down and sobbed violently, and led her from the room. Ed shut the door, and after a pause in which he glanced at his father's form, strolled back to him.

"I'm sorry, dad," he mumbled. "But you brought it on yourself."

"I never said a word—not one."

"No, but it's the way you act. Somehow you don't understand——"

"Understand what?"

"It's hard to explain, dad. But you seem to us to be ignorant of how others feel. You go on making money, giving speeches, attending meetings, preaching recruiting sermons, and seem to forget we are—well, having a pretty rotten time of it down here. This is the first time you've been to see us for a deuce of a time. Here's mother eating her heart out about something, Evelyn's chased out of Wilmslow, and—well, things are all wrong. Up in town you don't get time to think. Down here we don't get time to do anything else. You plan up in town, and we see the results of it down here. I'm not blaming you, mind. You're in it, and you've got to stick it, I s'pose."

"What can I do?"

"I know. That's the rotten part of it. It's got you, and you can't get loose. It's what some people call 'the system.' That's what's all wrong. It was 'the system' which got hold of you when we were little 'uns. It took you away from us then, and we've seen very little of you since. In a way it's like the Government who have thought so much of the empire that they've forgotten there is such a place as Britain. Power and glory overseas, and poverty and grime at home. You know what I mean. I've heard you make electioneering speeches in that strain when the other lot was in office. It's like as if you'd made a machine you daren't leave for a blessed moment."

"But I had to think of you all and make money to educate you and to give you some position."

"And now we don't want it——"

"Want—don't want what?"

He sat up, blew his nose noisily and blinked at Ed.

"The money."

Sir Alfred thought for a while but failed to grasp what his son meant.

"You ought to know, dad. Perhaps it's best you should know. It might help you to take things easier."

"Know what? What is it?" he asked querulously.

"Well Evelyn, Ellen and I will not want any money. You needn't take another order so far as we're concerned."

"Why?"

"Candidly—we won't take it. We've made up our minds. Maybe you don't know what to make of me. It's funny, I know. But I've changed, dad. All my old notions have been clean knocked out of me. I'm going to start afresh, if I have to begin on nothing."

"What are you going to do?" his father whined plaintively.

"Well, the army has no use for this kind of thing," Ed said, holding up what remained of his right hand. "So they can let me out as soon as they like—one less to pay. Anyway, whole or maimed, I should get out when it's over even if I went through it. What I'll do doesn't much matter. I'm not ambitious. So you needn't worry about me, dad."

"Ed, my boy," his father said, rising and taking him by the shoulders, "I know you've had a rough time of it. They have treated you shamefully—cross or no cross. But that Jawton business will be set right if I have to——"

"Never mind that. I don't think of it now, so put it out of your mind. You couldn't set it right if you tried. The system wouldn't let you try. It's discipline. Jawton is a colonel, I'm only a captain. There it is in a nutshell. But the other matter is the important one, dad."

"Which is that?"

"Money. Business."

"Oh!"

"Can't you give it up?"

"Impossible, Ed, I can't desert the Government just when they need me most. Besides, think of the enormous number of new plants I am putting down all over the country. The expense is fearful."

"I see. You can't cut loose, can you?"

"It's unthinkable, my boy. Duty is a hard task-master. And I have my duty to perform——"

"Well, we'll not go into that, dad," Ed said quickly, fearing his father would launch into a series of perorations on sacrifice, duty and patriotism. "But—but—do understand, Evelyn, Ellen and I won't take any money—we shall not need it."

"Won't take any? You mean——"

"I can't make it plainer, dad. We shan't take a penny of what you've made."

"There's some reason I don't——"

"We don't like the way it's been made."

"Armaments."

"Now you've got it, dad. Armaments. That's it. We're sorry—very. It's best you should know—it might make it easier for you to get out when you haven't got to think of us."

The conscience of Sir Alfred had been so long encased in thick tough hide it was too late to try to touch it. For over thirty years he had suppressed it, kept it dormant so long, that it had become a hard shriveled kernel in his big shell. He had used it so little of late years it had lost its sense of response.

"I never thought you would be squeamish," he murmured.

"Squeamish! Why it almost makes me sick to think of taking up an attitude that seems moral. I'm no saint. And my conversion came a bit late. Besides, I've enjoyed myself on your money a deuce of a time. I can't explain clearly, but I've changed completely. In a way it's a funk—but I began to funk while I lay thinking in the hospital. The thing that knocks the stuffing out of me is the fact that we have been living on the money of your shells which are used by most of the combatants. For all I know I was wounded by your patents fired by Germans. And Herbert—twice wounded—might have been laid out by ammunition from our factories here. That's horrible. War's bad enough, God knows, but this business is really damnable."

He knew he could give Ed a complete answer if he wished, but he kept silent. It interested him to listen to his son, who only a little while ago, would have blushed to attempt to put a half dozen sentences together in one speech. Now to hear him

thread so much together in his slow rather ponderous way interested the fluent platform man. He caught himself thinking what a fine effect in time of peace he could make with the same material, if the other side were in, and he not interested in making ammunition.

"Hope you don't feel hurt," Ed muttered.

"Hurt. Oh, no. I look at all these things from a different angle. I am after the good that is sure to come out of the evil. Only through the pain and woe of war can Prussian militarism be crushed. There can never be enduring peace until that is accomplished. We dare not sheath the sword until that is done. Now, you must not confuse two diametrically opposed ideas. Industry is one thing—war is another. You don't for a moment believe I set up the shell and bullet business to bring about war, do you? The idea's preposterous! When I began that business everybody was agreed armies and navies were indispensable forces for the defense of empires—food supply—merchant-marine and all that kind of thing. I supplied a perfectly legitimate demand, one that had the full sanction of both political parties. The business grew. International relations became strained, and the great nations formed themselves into two diplomatic groups. Naturally, our friends, France and Russia, desired to have as good ammunition as ours, and I cooperated with them in opening plants—but solely for purposes of defense. Then Austria and Germany got to know about our products, and they wanted to manufacture them. Well, I, never dreaming the two groups would really go to war, extended our business to Germany

and Austria, believing they were as keen as we were to keep the world's peace. But I was taken in. De-luded, Ed. They meant to smash us all the time. Peace was not in their hearts. They had sold themselves to Satan and Nietzsche. Instead of the peace principles of the prophets and our Lord Jesus Christ, they took the godless guidance of Bernhardt and—what's the other fellow's name? There you have it."

He wound up with a flourish of his arms, and extended his hands with a final gesture of delivering the whole truth to Ed. He was so pleased with the effect that he wished the speech had been made to the Grand Council of Dissenters. He knew it would have fetched them all.

"Now to bed. I have a busy day in town to-morrow. Good night, my boy."

With a tap on Ed's shoulder, he left him silent and oppressed. The debate had wearied Ed, so much talking fatigued him. He felt like going up to bed, but he thought his father had to be answered. How, he did not know. That there was a reply, he felt sure. He sat down to think it over and charged his pipe. He was puffing away when Ellen came into the room.

"Little 'un! Not gone yet?" he said.

"No, I waited until he went to bed. I've been with mother. She's pretty sick, Ed. Evelyn's with her now. Walk a bit of the way with me. It's a beautiful night."

They started off to the village in the cool tranquil night. The stars hung low, and the elms rustled gently in the fitful breeze. Some ducks, high up,

passed over toward Clungford ponds. And Ed thought of Clarice and nights on the white road, driving back and forth. The happy indolent days of ignorance of and trust in the future.

"Ben will be sitting up for me," Ellen said.

"It's late, little 'un, and you've got to take care of yourself."

He towered above her as she took short firm steps at his side. It amused him to see her elfish white face in the strange bluey light upturned to his own.

"What did you make of dad?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing. My fault I think."

"Your fault?"

"I think so. You see I'm all mixed up when I argue. I can only feel what is right and wrong. I don't know yet how to put it into words. He had me squarely beaten at the end, but he wasn't right by a long shot. I was licked, but he didn't convince me."

Ellen liked that big brawny brother of hers. She felt he was full of good stuff.

"Dad's an expert juggler, Ed. He hasn't been a party politician for nothing, nor a denominational fanatic in his youth without learning the art of arguing away for an opponent's points. He won't face up to them. Not likely."

"That was it, was it?" Ed thought. Then he remembered how skilfully his father evaded the real issue between them and buried it under a heap of pulpit buncombe. He laughed at the way he had been done by his father.

"Pretty slick, isn't he?" Ed chuckled, amused at his own simplicity.

"As crafty as a weasel."

"It's the life he leads, I s'pose."

They walked on in silence for some time. At "the Twins"—two enormous oaks—the road turned sharp to the south, and down the hill they noticed one or two lights in the bottom where the village lay.

"Mother's going to become a Catholic," Ellen said.

"Is she?" Ed muttered, with as little concern as if he had been told she was going to bed.

"Yes. She told me so to-night. Dad doesn't know yet."

"Will he cut up rough about it?"

"Sure to. He hates Romans—worse than Huns. He'll be at his best on that when he hears. I told mother to do just what she likes and not worry."

Ben was half-way up the village street starting out again to meet his wife. They saw his tall figure moving like a black streak up the middle of the road.

"I've been down twice. Hullo, Ed. Will you come in?"

"Just a moment—for a cup of hot milk," Ellen pleaded.

The house was quiet, the others were all in bed. It was their busy season, and they retired unusually early.

"Harry came home—about seven—just after you went out," Ben said. "He has thrown up his job in Manchester."

Ellen turned to Ed and said: "Harry is Ben's young brother—an architect. You don't remember

him, Ed. He only came here occasionally since he went away to study."

"He's had a pretty, bad time of it," Ben explained. "He won't enlist. Some weeks ago he began to receive anonymous postcards: 'Why don't you enlist, you coward?' You know the kind of thing. Usually sent by old men or young women. He's been fearfully pestered, so I gather. Then a woman stopped in the street and gave him a white feather. To make things worse it was discovered his employer's wife was born in Germany. Then they made things hum. His employer had to close the office and shut up his house. Now, he has gone to live near the sanatorium in Scotland where his half-demented wife is lodged. Nice, isn't it?"

"Culture, par excellence!" Ellen exclaimed. "But what can you expect when we are educationally ninth in the list of nations? The people are not to blame here any more than they are to blame on the Continent. Taste is not an instinct, and refinement is not to be expected from wage slaves. They don't get a decent chance. The ruling classes here are every bit as stupid, as cruel, as they are in Prussia. There's really nothing to choose."

"Harry is a sensitive creature," Ben remarked, after a pause in which Ellen poured the milk into glasses. "He is an artist and fanatically moral. War hurts him. The thought of it unhinges him. He's a peculiar chap. Almost delicate in feeling—a lot of the woman in him. But very brave morally—indeed, he is one of the most truly courageous fellows I know."

They sipped their milk and thought of Harry.

"He'll crack up, I'm afraid," Ben said. "He stood it all right until they started to persecute Mrs. Ravensworth, his employer's wife, then he buckled up."

"I'm glad he has come home," Ellen said.

It was nearly one o'clock when Ed left Tonks' house in the village. Everything was still, the fitful breeze had died away. In the east, miles away toward Staffordshire, open forges every now and then flashed their ruddy lights against the sky. As he turned past "the Twins" he saw the glare of a motor approaching down the road. He walked on toward it, keeping well in near the hedge to let it pass. It must be running slowly, he thought, as he advanced. Strange it did not pass him. Then he realized it must have stopped, something gone wrong with it. When he got up to it he found Harold with some of his friends standing near the car. One was slightly intoxicated. They had been to a recruiting meeting in the Potteries. The chauffeur was busy changing a tire.

"That you, Ed?" Harold asked, peering over the side of the car.

"Yes. It's only a puncture, isn't it?"

"That's all."

"Good night."

Ed was moving off again when the intoxicated man exclaimed: "'S that your brother, Vicar? Lemme have a look at him. So that's the chap that fun——"

Whether Harold put his hand over his friend's mouth or not Ed could not tell, but he heard a bit of a struggle and some fierce whispering going on.

Ed thought for a moment, and then went back.

Harold and another man stood between Ed and the fuddled person. The lamp shone full upon them. They watched Ed make straight for them. On he came, and went through them, as they gave way on each side.

He grasped the gurgling roysterer, turned him round and looked him straight in the face. He blinked at the strong light. Ed had his back to it, and his face looked like a black patch to the blinking tippler.

"Now finish what you were going to say."

Ed's left hand held him in a tightening grip.

"Oh, my God. Leggo. My arm!"

It was no use struggling. Ed had his fingers full of the soft flesh, and he was vexed.

"Christ—you're hurting."

"Say it——"

Harold came up: "Ed, it's Victor Lawley—he's only drunk."

"He'll be sober in a minute."

Harold's other friend strolled away to watch the chauffeur.

"Apologize, Victor," the vicar shouted into Lawley's face, clouded and wrinkled with pain and rage.

"Let him think it over," Ed murmured. "I'm not pressed for time."

"He'll hold you there till daylight, you fool," Harold cried, exasperated at his friend's obstinacy.

"Apologize, you ass."

"I—I apologize."

Victor was limp when Ed let him go.

They listened to Ed's feet crunching along the highway, until they were sure he was out of earshot.

"Did he hurt you?" Harold asked.

"Blast him, yes. Thought his bloody fingers were going right through my arm." Lawley replied.

"Serve you damn well right, you silly ass," the third man muttered. "You forgot he had another fist."

"Ed's a terror when he's roused," Harold remarked.

The chauffeur put his tools away, brushed the dust from his knees, and soon they were whirling off toward the vicarage which lay about a mile beyond the village.

Ed trudged on. His thoughts were occupied with the careers of Harold's friends. Victor Lawley was the son of the archdeacon, and now enjoyed the honor of buying fodder from farmers for the Government. Victor was an only son—a gambler, a tippler and a gentleman of debt and leisure. The other—Ed knew him. He was the Honorable Willoughby Stoke. His father owed Sir Alfred a lot of money. Willoughby was a nephew of the bishop. He was buying horses for the Government. But he knew more about horses than Lawley knew about fodder. His distinction in life had been bankruptcy and women. Both were "good fellows." "Jolly dogs" the county would say of them. They were first-class recruiting speakers, full of jest and humorous stories. Harold was good to them, their connections were so influential.

So, thought Ed, as he walked up the drive, young Harry Tonks is hounded out of Manchester because he has conscientious objections, and Lawley and Stoke, both of military age, buy fodder and horses for the State.

CHAPTER XV

HARRY TONKS had not been long in the village before the vicar heard of his visit. Knowing nothing about the reason why he left Manchester, Harold took an early opportunity of sizing him up, as they passed on the road, and decided then and there Harry was physically fit to be shot. All the family of Tonks were nothing but mean, narrow, bigoted dissenters, so Harold thought. He disliked them all, and particularly Ben, who, by marrying Ellen, had let him down badly before the whole county. Lawley, who was staying at the vicarage while he was buying fodder in that area, was larking with Mrs. Harold's nurse maid in the garden when the vicar, after seeing Harry, walked up the path.

"Victor, that you?" Harold shouted over some bushes at the fodder merchant, who was chasing the frightened nurse around a bed of gladiola. "What you up to?"

"Playing tick to amuse the baby," the glib Victor answered.

The nurse hastened to her charge and wheeled it off toward the house. Lawley joined the vicar, and dropped a sly wink.

"Now, don't, Victor. Play the game while you're here," Harold said, referring to Lawley's sport with the nurse.

"Nothing, my boy, to be alarmed about. Innocent fun, I assure you."

Harold knew his guest, and how innocent his fun had been on a former visit to the vicarage.

"Look here," he said. "You know Tonks?"

"Chap that married your sister?"

"Yes. Well, his brother is here. Been here for a week or so. Skulking——"

"Not in khaki?"

"No."

"Anything wrong with him?"

"Nothing. He looks a fine up-standing chap."

"Damn his cheek. He'll have to get into khaki," Lawley exclaimed. "You're vicar here, Harold. Why the devil didn't you ask him what he jolly well means?"

"Only saw him for the first time to-day—just now."

"Get after him at once. It's your duty, Harold."

Harold thought he might meet Harry in the street about the time the London papers reached Crowington, so next morning he strolled into the village and hung about talking to the shopkeepers, on the watch for his prey. Harry, who had been for a long walk, was returning home when he met the vicar, whom he scarcely knew, at the top of the village.

"Good morning," Harold saluted.

Harry looked sharply at the vicar and dropped him a nod. He did not stop, but cast Harold a look which a rather preoccupied man might give to a stranger.

"Oh—a—" Harold blurted stupidly. But Harry had passed, and was striding down the street.

The worst of it was, Tomlinson, the draper, was putting up the awning for his shop window and saw what happened. Harold turned crimson. He

burned with chagrin and vexation. Tomlinson was a deacon at Tonks' Chapel.

When Lawley heard the story from the vicar he laughed merrily. Secretly he was glad. He felt some respect for Harry Tonks and was keen to see him.

"Didn't he know you?"

"Everybody here knows me," Harold exclaimed.

"But, Harold, Harry Tonks has not seen you for years—not since you've been vicar, I should think," Mrs. Harold remarked.

"You don't understand," Harold snapped.

"You forget the cloth," Lawley explained to her. "He should have known the vicar by the cut of his coat."

"If I had my way I'd teach these vulgar rānters some manners," Harold growled.

"Have another go, Harold, but let me be with you the next time," Lawley laughed, as he slapped Harold on the back.

The next day Harry had a visit from a county recruiting officer who found him most affable and communicative.

"There's been some mistake," the officer said apologetically. "I was given to understand that you wanted to enlist, but didn't understand about the pay and pensions."

"No, I don't want to enlist," Harry said, smiling blandly at the discomfited officer. "Such an idea never entered my head."

"And I've come up all the way from Minsterley—"

"I'm very sorry you've had your journey for nothing," Harry said, opening the door. "It's too

bad. I hope no one has been playing a silly practical joke. All my intimate friends know I am a non-resister."

The man marched down the path and mounted his cycle. When he reached the office at Minsterley he spoke his mind freely to the officer in charge, and wound up his report with: "I'm not used to being made a fool of for nothing."

In Harold's correspondence the next morning there was a letter from his friend, Colonel Hinstock, saying the time was too serious for practical jokes, that one of his men had wasted several hours going out to Crowington to see a non-resister who at no time ever dreamed of enlisting.

Harold spent a restless day. He moped about the vicarage, ill-tempered and quarrelsome, and when Lawley returned in the evening, after a day spent in buying fodder, he was not the better pleased for seeing his friend the worse for liquor.

They quarreled that night after dinner, and Lawley left the vicarage the next morning, much to the relief of Mrs. Harold and her baby's nurse.

Who selected the village of Crowington for a recruiting meeting puzzled a lot of people who read the announcement posted about the parish. Who was there to recruit in that place of sorrow? There might be a few men on the outlying farms to be spared after the harvest was in, but scarcely enough to make it worth while holding a meeting. Still, there were the bills: At the Horton-Birkett Institute, old General Pennett in the chair, the member for the division, Mr. Jevons Oldcastle, and an ar-

ray of county folk including the vicar. Crowington was one of the few villages where political meetings were not held. The seat had been overwhelmingly conservative and it was a hopeless task for the other side to attempt a serious contest. Hence the notion some villagers bruited about that the meeting was really one to give them an opportunity of seeing their member.

Ben said he would come down from town to attend the meeting. The bills were posted on a Saturday morning, and the gathering was to take place on the next Monday week. Interest deepened as the days passed, and great things were expected from the platform of notabilities.

But the delivery of the registration forms had to take place before the meeting was held, and Sir Alfred came from town to perform his promise. He had informed the authorities that he would undertake personally the work, and asked for the forms to be sent direct to him. He had passed a strenuous week in town with the War Office and members of the Cabinet. The question of high explosives perturbed the minds of editors and officials. For weeks the serious shortage of ammunition had been discussed on platforms, in the columns of newspapers and in Parliament, where, oddly enough, less discussion was permitted than in the press. Sir Alfred found himself in an extraordinary dilemma. He was urged by the Government to turn out asphyxiating shells. It was awkward, for the founder of the great ammunition industry which never deviated a hair's breadth from Hague rules, had only a few weeks ago at the meeting of the Grand Council of

Dissenters, moved the resolution of condemnation against Germany's employment of gas shells. But what could he do when the Government in such a crisis asked him, nay, ordered him, to turn out the very kind of ammunition he had denounced as the "brutally inhuman invention of a fiendish government"? Earnestly he prayed no report of the Government's request would get into the papers. The authorities did, however, appreciate the delicacy of his predicament, and promised to save him unnecessary pain.

All might have been well but for the action of one of his board of directors. At the meeting hurriedly called to consider the Government's appeal to the firm to make gas shells, Mr. Leverton protested solemnly against such a course. He reminded the board of the esteem which the firm had won all over the civilized world by conforming strictly to Hague rules of warfare. To adopt the methods of Germany, methods which had revolted the whole world, would be a sacrifice of principle he, for one, would never tolerate. The Government arsenals should shoulder responsibilities of that kind, it was most unfair to lay them on individual manufacturers. There was a limit to sacrifice of principle, and if the board determined to make gas shells for the Government, he would be obliged to place his resignation in their hands.

That evening a London newspaper announced the resignation of Mr. Leverton, owing to the firm's intention of making asphyxiating shells. Provincial organs copied the startling news, and into the local paper which circulated from Minsterley, crept the

report of Mr. Leverton's stand for principle. Ellen read it, Ed read it, and they marveled at the change wrought by war and time on their father's pet schemes.

"France began it last October," Ed said, as he threw the local print aside. "I remember reading a very full account of the effect of their shell."

"I read it, too," Ben acknowledged. "It was in the *Daily Caligraph*. The description of trenches full of German dead covered with yellow dust was horrible."

"Well, you never know what will happen in war," Ellen exclaimed. "What horrifies you to-day may be your only hope to-morrow. The cant of Sunday is the practise of Monday. For my part somehow I respect the real soldier who goes about it without twaddle and hypocrisy. I can understand Admiral Fisher when he says, 'If you rub it in both at home and abroad that you are ready for instant war, with every unit of your strength in the first line and waiting to be first in and hit your enemy, and kick him when he is down, and boil your prisoners in oil (if you take any), and torture his women and children, then people will keep clear of you!'"

"Ellen! That is frightful," Ed muttered. An expression of disgust covered his face.

"I know, but it is the real thing. I have been reading a book by Major Stewart-Murray, called *The Future Peace of the Anglo-Saxons*,—a strange title just now—and he says, 'The worst of all errors in war is a mistaken spirit of benevolence.' Don't you really agree, Ed? Don't you see the utter folly of the soldiers' actions in war being directed

by pacifists at home? Major Stewart-Murray says: 'He who uses his force unsparingly without reference to the quantity of bloodshed, must obtain a superiority if his adversary does not act likewise! That is obvious. Consider our methods in South Africa. If there is one thing more than another that I can't stand in dad's gospel of cant it is his perfectly damnable delusion about Christian methods of warfare. Poor old man, may the 'gas' pill he has to swallow purge him of all slobber and slop."

It was a glorious night when Sir Alfred started out to deliver the registration forms. His secretary had prepared the envelopes, addressed them and arranged them in order, so that his employer might do all the cottages on his left hand. The preparatory work was neatly done. Not for many months had Sir Alfred thought of taking so long a walk—quite five miles. All he had to do was to knock at each door and hand the papers in with a word or two of explanation. But before he finished all the cottages on his outward journey he was hot and somewhat distressed. Going down the hill in the village he began to ponder the real need of his mission. It seemed to him unnecessary, tiresome, trivial. Why should he waste so much time? Anyway, there was no one in Crowington the Government would use. Ed was right. It did seem a gratuitous insult. He had knocked on so many doors, and had spoken the silly sounding words: "You are to fill in these forms and sign them," without any more response than, "Thank you, Sir Alfred," that he ached for want of some opposition.

All zest in the work was gone before he turned at the far end of the village to start the homeward journey. At some doors he pushed the envelope in without explanation, and in his haste to get the task done he dropped the bundle in attempting to close a door opened by a child of five years. The envelopes fluttered about the pavement, and, as he gathered them up, Sir Alfred passed some terse remarks about the president of the Local Government Board who came into his mind just then as the instigator of his fruitless errand.

He knocked on Tonks' door and passed an envelope to Lizzie, Ben's sister. It was addressed to Babbicombe, the grocer. Lizzie called after Sir Alfred whom she had not recognized, "Here, this is not for us." Back he trudged to the woman standing at the door.

"This is for Babbicombe," she said.

"Oh, is it? Thank you. Sorry. They've got mixed up. The light is not good, is it?" he muttered, fumbling the disordered packet.

"Come inside," she said, holding the door open.

"Thanks. Just to see and put them in order," he said, passing into the house.

"Oh, it's you, Sir Alfred," Lizzie exclaimed, when she saw him in the lighted room.

Old Thomas Tonks sat in his chair near the fireplace, and at the table eating supper sat Ellen, Ben, Harry and Ed. They all rose the moment Lizzie said, "Oh, it's you, Sir Alfred." He stared at the group and turned red; his coloring deepening every second. It was the first time he had set foot in Tonks' house. Had he guessed whose house it

was he would have seen the registration forms in hell before he accepted Lizzie's invitation to step inside.

"Dad!" Ellen blurted. She could not suppress a smile, her sense of humor was too much for her just then.

"Sir Alfred, welcome," Ben said, placing a chair against the back of his father-in-law's knees.

Lizzie had shut the door, and had taken his hat and stick. Ed pressed him down on the chair. His father's heavy chin drooped low, and his big round shoulders seemed to heave into a greater curve as he searched the envelopes on his lap for the one addressed to Tonks.

"Hope I'm not intruding?" he ventured, in an apologetic tone. "I dropped the bundle, and the envelopes are disarranged."

"Oh! I see! You're delivering the registration forms," Ellen cried.

"Yes, but I'm afraid I've lost the one for this house. I can't find it——"

"Don't trouble, Sir Alfred," old Tonks said in a tense tone. "If you did find it it would be of no service." He glared at his visitor, and his shaky voice rose in volume. "No one here would sign away his liberty——"

"Liberty! But Mr. Tonks—the law!"

"Freedom is the only law I recognize. I am no traitor to my fellows. Shall I forget the past? Shall I make myself the slave of passions which are cruel and merciless? Never, Sir Alfred, never."

"Granddad, don't forget Sir Alfred is our guest," Ben interposed quietly.

"I speak to him as one dissenter to another," the

old man cried. "He is no guest of mine. For nearly thirty years he has lived here and this is the first time I have spoken to him. He is the president of our grand council and I will speak to him under my own roof as I would speak to him in council." He turned his glance on Sir Alfred, who tapped his toes impatiently on the stone floor. Then under the scornful eyes of old Tonks he quailed like a boy in dread of a certain whipping. The old ranter seemed to hover over him like an avenging angel ready to launch the full record of the sinner on the world before giving chastisement.

"You have avoided me," Tonks cried in a voice of thunder. "You have shunned me."

Sir Alfred knew it was true. He had avoided meeting Tonks. The truth burned in like a hot coal.

"I—I—I—I have been—so busy—" Sir Alfred began.

The old man cut his explanation off with: "Busy as Satan from all accounts and at his worst work, too. I know your work. And you the president of dissenters!"

"What have I done, Mr. Tonks?"

"Done! You have poured contempt upon us here. This chapel has never seen your shadow on its threshold. For years I counted the Sabbaths you spent at Crowington, hoping, praying, you would have the pluck to snap your fingers at the county and worship God in your father's way. But no. No, your social position here was more important than your duty to your chapel. If you had left us, shunned us openly, scorned worship with us, cursed us, we would not have felt it so sorely as your silent contempt."

"I am exceedingly grieved to hear you say that," Sir Alfred muttered. "Exceed-ing-ly. Such thoughts never entered my mind. I came here for rest and quietude. My life in town and in Parliament has been so strenuous I have scarcely had rest enough during the week to keep me up. I regret—I deeply regret to know that my conduct has been misunderstood."

Harry sat in a corner of the fireplace, balancing a poker on the high fender. He knew his grandfather's mind on the position for he had been the recipient of his confidence in regular weekly letters over a period of seven or eight years.

"A man can please himself, grandad," Harry muttered, without looking up. "He is not obliged to attend chapel."

"That is perfectly true," old Tonks replied, "but when a man is leader of a cause he has to think of the effect of his actions on his followers. Leaders are not free, bad leaders are free to please themselves only. A real leader must sacrifice himself; the price of his leadership is the loss of his own individual freedom."

Sir Alfred listened to the old ranter and marveled at his power. Once again he felt the keen interest in the struggle upward of the true peasant breaking away from the shackles of ignorance and ecclesiastical slavery. How firm the old man was in his notions of conduct. Long years of deep study of the English Bible had given him clear speech and fearless expression.

"Is there such a thing as leadership in non-conformity?" Ben asked. "I mean is there any one who

really leads the mass to a goal, and is there a mass who follows to a goal?"

"No, not now, Ben," the old man shook his head sadly. "Our men ceased to lead when through party policies they mingled with our foes. When riches came to them, and gave them social advancement, they forgot the past and lost interest in half-won fights. Religious freedom is no more a cry to rouse the peasant dissenter, and the tyranny of the church is fast regaining its hold."

"I don't think so, Mr. Tonks," Sir Alfred returned suavely. "The church is in a sad state. It has taken a very worldly part in this crisis. It seems to me the future is ours. True, the Brotherhood movement has taken great masses of young men away from the strict life of the chapel, but they are with us still in spirit. Now, the church is finding its pews growing emptier and emptier every year. Soon it will be a mere shell—a m-e-r-e shell. The fight in the House—there is none in the country—against the Welsh Disestablishment Bill is to my mind an indication of the weakness of the church. The bitterness, rancor and acrimony it rouses in many great Anglicans, convinces me they know they are supporting a dying cause. The loss of temper and judgment means a great deal—in my opinion—and they know their sway is at an end. Now—"

"That may be, but—" old Thomas broke in.

"Allow me, Mr. Tonks. Al-low—me. Now, I heartily agree with you about the change in certain non-conformists. Wealth has been the undoing of so many. The ease it brings, the desire to fall back and just enjoy the luxury and pleasure of existence,

is highly detrimental. No one knows that more than I. But it is a passing phase. This awful war will bring us out of it all a purged and finer people. Out of this terrible evil great golden good will come, and—"

"No, no good out of evil. The devil's text, Sir Alfred. Why good out of evil? Can there not be good without evil? No good can possibly come from war—"

"Mr. Tonks—really! Did not Jesus say I come not to bring peace, but a sword—"

"Never! Not in that sense! Horrible notion!" the old man roared.

"Then in what sense, pray?" Sir Alfred ventured meekly.

"That His gospel as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount would be fought by upholders of tyranny, oppression, and evil, with the sword. There is no other meaning. Jesus was prophetic. He saw quite clearly that the poor in preaching His doctrine of justice would be put to the sword by the rich. And has that not been the history of the world—before His time and after—that when peaceful men ask for justice in the name of God, Cæsar puts them to the sword? You talk of this war purging us. Does it look like it? When was there so much wickedness in all the world as now? Look at the newspapers day after day. Think of the debasing appeals for men, aye, posted on the walls of this almost manless village. The war purge us of evil? What happened to your own daughter Evelyn? She was persecuted by her own countrymen. Look at your son, Harold. A vicar parading the countryside in search of men

to be massacred. And Ben—for stating the case for conscientious objectors, hounded in the press, denounced from pulpit, and the victim of the anonymous postcard writer. Now, Harry, driven from his work because he will not enlist. He, too, slandered on postcards, and here, in this village, harried by recruiting officers from Minsterley. And now you come with your registration forms—come here—to this house! Will the war purge you?”

“Granddad! Come, come!” Ben exclaimed, going to the old man and trying to soothe him.

“I don’t mind, Ben,” Sir Alfred protested, with a smile of great tolerance. “Your grandfather is of a school, I am very sorry to say, lost to this generation. I deserve all he says. But, of course, I am of another time. Perhaps I am as much a product of these days as your grandfather is of the days of Cobden and Bright.”

“Isn’t grandfather rather a product of a much earlier time?” Harry asked, still balancing the poker. “He seems to me to be thinking in old religious terms, not political terms.”

“I think so,” Ellen said, “but dad is in a strange atmosphere. He does not know your methods of debate. You must admit, Harry, we are peculiar folk in this house. This is not called Liberty Hall for nothing. I was amazed when I came here at the freedom of expression. You get to realities, if I may say so. Dad is a parliamentarian—he is steeped in the atmosphere of the Commons where realities are seldom faced. Dad speaks the argot of the lobby and the party platform. Loyalty to party and the party leaders is his fetish. Grandfather

knows nothing of that. Would you say, Ben, grandfather owes loyalty to God?"

"Yes and no, but aren't we getting dangerously pharisaical?"

"A bit priggish?" Ellen suggested. "Maybe."

"I don't agree, Ellen," her father demurred. "You were on safe ground in your distinction. And now I think of it, Mr. Tonks' interpretation of Christ's statement, 'I came not to bring peace, but a sword,' is very clever."

"Send, not bring. Send is the word. And why Christ? Why not Jesus?" Harry asked.

"Well, Jesus—if you prefer it," Sir Alfred snapped testily. "But I feel sure I'm on safe ground when I say He had to resort to violence—corporal punishment—on occasion."

"When?" Ellen inquired.

"In the temple," her father replied, with a superior smile. "Are we not told that He made a scourge—a scourge, mind you!—of small cords and drove the money-changers out of the temple?"

"John says so—but only John," Harry said. "Matthew and Mark give a very different account. Luke supports their testimony in chapter nineteen, verse forty-five."

Sir Alfred's mouth opened wide in astonishment. Harry was bent over the fender, his back to Sir Alfred. He spoke calmly, easily, as if the subject were familiar—an oft-debated one.

"If you will turn to Matthew twenty-first, the twelfth verse, you will find nothing there about a scourge. Jesus simply cast the money-changers out and overturned their tables. In Mark eleventh, verse

fifteen, you will find complete corroboration of Matthew's account of the incident. Nothing about a scourge. He simply turned a gang of thieves out of the temple. That was all. He did them no bodily harm. Only John, writing long years after the event, mentions a scourge. Well, I prefer the evidence of Matthew and Mark, and they do not tell of anything which violates the theory of non-resistance."

Sir Alfred's pride was hurt. He, the President of the Grand Council of Dissenters, to be set right on Scripture, and before old Tonks, was humiliating.

"Then I prefer St. John," he exclaimed.

"As you wish," Harry smiled. "He was certainly the theologian."

"Anyway, he fully appreciated how sinful it was to turn the temple into a den of thieves, and that they thoroughly deserved the scourge," Sir Alfred said, his voice becoming hoarse from anger. "Whipping is too light a punishment for some evil-doers. But I am not prepared to carry this argument further. Suffice it to say, the work of the world must be done."

"There, dad," Ed exclaimed suddenly, as if he had been looking long for some point to lay hold of, "that's the very thing. That's what Ellen means. Those meaningless phrases which pass muster in party politics and will not stand analysis. 'The work of the world must be done.' Now what on earth does that mean?"

His father was perplexed for a moment. He had never been asked point-blank to tell the meaning of a well-worn phrase. It seemed to him meticulous criticism to nail him down to a definition of it.

"Mean, What—wha—wha—does it mean?" he stammered.

"Yes. What is the work of the world?"

"Why—a—um—civilization—"

"You mean the work of civilization as it is practised to-day must be done? You will admit, dad, there is Tory civilization and Radical civilization. Which is it that should be done? You have always strongly objected to the former—"

Ellen paused and a strange smile hovered about her mouth.

"Years ago before we took Crowington," Ed put in.

"Yes, when we were young. You know, dad, you have not been much of a Radical since you became a landed proprietor. Still great changes have taken place in both parties. The Tory party has become quite socialistic in its endeavor to catch votes; and the Liberal party of late years has done its best to copy all the bureaucratic legislation of Germany. Old age pensions, insurance, town planning, and all that patriarchal method of poulticing social ulcers has been cribbed from Prussia. So doing the work of the world, or civilization, if you prefer it, in the legislative sense, won't do, will it?"

Her father looked at her queerly through his half-closed lids. It seemed to him that his children were bent on showing him up before the Tonkses. Or did they forget while they were discussing the questions that he was their father? The thought came into his mind and made him feel desolate, forgotten.

"Well, I have always tried to do the work of civilization," he said sadly. "We can only do the best that is in us."

"And what is the work of civilization?" Harry inquired.

"The work of civilization?" Sir Alfred repeated in a surprised tone. "Oh, the work of progress."

"Industry?—Social affairs?—Government?—"

"Yes—certainly. The great work of administering a country's laws, and—"

"Is that worth doing?" Ben asked.

"Ben, I am amazed at—" Sir Alfred said regretfully.

"But, dad, you have spent half of your political life in trying to annul many of the country's laws," Ellen reminded him.

"Of course, and that was doing the work of the world," her father exclaimed triumphantly.

"Would you agree it is the work of the world that nine nations are doing in killing millions?" Harry asked.

"No, of course not. That is a return to barbarism. I do not mean the work of war—"

"But that is what concerns you morning, noon and night," Ed observed.

"Well, we can not leave our men to be slaughtered. We must send them support. We must give them weapons and munitions to defend themselves. We must be patriotic."

"And give them asphyxiating shells?" Ed inquired.

"Mr. Leverton would not," Ellen put in.

"Mr. Leverton, Mr. Lev-er-ton," her father repeated, with fine scorn. "He has only left the board of the company. He has not sold his shares."

"Still, he did protest against your making gas shells," Ellen remarked.

"And if he did! What of it? The Government must be obeyed. They order us to make the shells, and we dare not disobey."

"Dare not?" thundered old Tonks. "Dare not?"

"Yes, Mr. Tonks, dare not," Sir Alfred shouted, losing his suavity, nettled by the heckling. "And you would not dare to brave public opinion. This is not a business of braving a lot of grooms and laborers as in the old days, when they threatened to throw you in the horsepond, if you preached against the wishes of the squires and parsons. I know how you braved public opinion in the old days. But this is different. We are in the midst of the greatest war the world has ever known, and the public are in no mood for sentimentality. If I refused to make the shells—what then? Every one would cut me, my constituents would disown me, the papers would call me traitor, the church would crow over the downfall of a leading dissenter, I should be hissed in the House, my business ruined—I—I might be shot."

He glanced at each face and found no sympathy.

"Well!" he blurted hoarsely.

"Well," old Tonks muttered. "What of it?"

"That's it, you see," Harry said kindly. "Sir Alfred can't understand us. He thinks—he believes, rather—that the papers, the church, the House and all that, matters. He thinks the ruin of his business is important. He might be shot. We are thinking of something else?"

Somehow Harry from the first had grated on Sir Alfred's nerves. He had heard of Harry Tonks from Evelyn. There was something too calm and

bland about him. He never got ruffled, and spoke in cutting kindness, a logic hard to meet.

"I don't wish to be rude," Sir Alfred said, looking straight at Harry, "but it's my opinion you should be thinking of going to France to see what it's like to be shot at."

There was a heavy silence for a moment, then it was broken by the deep breathing of old Tonks. Their eyes wandered not, their faces were set and serious.

"You are entitled to your opinion, Sir Alfred," Harry said quietly.

"You may be obliged to go—yet."

"They may try force, but I shall resist—"

"And you a non-resister," Sir Alfred grinned.

"You're thinking of physical resistance. I would not resist that way."

"Anyway, you would be shot."

"What of it? That would be better than doing any one any harm."

Harry rose and kissed Ellen.

"Good night," he said. "I think I'll go up-stairs and be alone for a while. Good night, Sir Alfred."

He held out his hand. Sir Alfred, like a man in a dream, took it mechanically, and dropped it. His eyes were fixed on Harry's face; there was pain there, and suffering lay in the eyes. It struck Sir Alfred to the core to see a young strong man hiding an agony of the soul. Harry went away silently and shut the stair door—it was like as if he had passed out of the world.

"Come, dad, I'll walk home with you," Ed said.

Sir Alfred shook himself, and took his hat and stick. Ellen went to him and kissed his cheek.

"Good night, Mr. Tonks," he said.

They walked in silence until they got out of the village. It was very dark, and Sir Alfred was so uncertain of the way Ed had to take his arm to steady him. The warm strong arm of his son was good to feel, and he pressed it affectionately, tightly against his side.

"I told you we were changed, dad," Ed said. "All changed! It will be a bit difficult now, but you mustn't think we don't—you know—feel just the same about you. We do. We feel more than ever—all of us do." Again Ed felt the tight squeeze of his father's arm and side.

"Don't feel sore at old Tonks. He's mighty blunt but sound as a bell. He takes things to heart, he's so old, you know. They've given Harry a pretty bad time of it—"

"Oh!" Sir Alfred stopped dead.

"What's up?"

"I've forgotten the registration forms—left 'em on the table," he gasped.

"Never mind, to-night. Send your man down for them in the morning, and get the rate collector to deliver the rest."

"No, I'll do it, Ed. I'll do it myself in the morning."

They went on again, the young man used to the darkness steering the old man whose eyes were failing. It was late when they parted at the foot of the wide staircase in the big quiet house.

CHAPTER XVI

ED was not sleepy when he turned the light out. He lay for a long time thinking of Harry. Since the night on the road when he gripped bibulous Victor Lawley's arm, he had hated himself for feeling revengeful. It troubled him sorely for days. The incident seemed to him so childish. Poor Lawley only gave expression in a drunken moment to a thought he would have suppressed had he been sober. And what did it really matter if Lawley believed he was a funk?

Harry had triumphed that night over his father, and now Ed felt he ought to have left Lawley alone. Harry had much more reason to lose his temper. In his case there was no superior officer to shield, to be sacrificed for, as in his case. Army discipline did not apply in Harry's case. The more he thought of the way Harry took his father's insinuations the more certain he became of the victory of mind force over physical force. Honor, which leans on what people think of you, paled into insignificance when compared with that honor which is planted firmly in the truth of what you think of yourself. The false conception of honor was responsible for most of the woes of the world. Diplomatic honor rested entirely on what others thought. Political, social and commercial honor lay seldom in the real mind of individuals. Strife arose from false conceptions of honor. Ed might have struck Lawley that night.

Indeed he could not understand how he refrained for his anger increased with every step he took back to find the tipsy fellow. So his mind worked as he lay sleepless in bed after the scene in Tonks' house.

Lady Horton-Birkett was up early. She had ordered the car to be ready at half past eight to take her to Penasaph. Sir Alfred was surprised to find her in her room dressed in hat and cloak. Her breakfast lay untouched on a tray near the bed.

"Going out?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Alfred."

"I heard the car. Where you off to?"

"Wales, dear—"

"Wales. Without your breakfast?"

He stood near the tray and looked the food over. In his dressing gown and pajamas, his thin hair ruffled, and his dark seamy face and chin bristly, he looked strangely unkempt and neglected.

"Surely you're not going so far without eating?"

"I shan't want anything until I return."

"What's up, Evie?"

She wondered how he would take it. Should she tell him or get the ceremony over first, and then break the news? There was a strange feeling at her heart, a sinking feeling, something like fear of him.

"You're very mysterious," he sneered. "What about?"

"Perhaps I ought to tell you now—"

What frightened him he did not know. It was her manner perhaps. Anyway he blurted out: "Good God, what is it?"

"Don't be alarmed," she smiled uneasily. "It's nothing. I am going to communion."

"All the way to Wales?"

"There's no church here, dear."

He rubbed his head and stared at her over his glasses.

"Where's it gone to? It was there yesterday."

"There is no Catholic church—"

"Catholic!" he gasped.

He drew in a long breath and steadied his glasses, which tilted over as he raised his head.

"You're going to communion at a Catholic church?"

"Yes."

"My God—my God! D'you mean to tell me that you're going to be a Catholic?"

"Yes, from to-day."

"You're going to worship images—idolatry!—you're going in for holy water—and confession—and all that rot?"

She sat down and waited for him to finish his remarks.

"What for? Why, in God's name? Have you thought of what it means? Do you know you will blast my career? Me, a dissenter, the president—" He gasped for breath. "It's awful! Frightful!" A violent fit of coughing shook him for several seconds. "Anything but that. Call yourself an atheist, a Mohammedan, anything you like but a Roman."

He sank on the bed, crushed, helpless, a picture of miserable impotence. She kept silent and let no expression of anger or contempt settle on her face.

"Who's at the bottom of this?" He sprang up and went to her.

"I am," she said, rising calmly. "No one, but me, Alfred. I must have some consolation. I can't find it in Harold's church, and you I scarcely ever see now—"

"Of course not. How can I be here when the Government is at me all the time. I have to stay in London ready to be on hand—any moment."

He paced up and down wrestling with his thoughts which hurt him and favored her.

"Great heavens! Everything's going to pieces," he cried.

"Yes, everything. Nothing will ever be the same again. We are all adrift, Alfred, and I must clutch something to bear me out of all this despair. I have been very unhappy. I can't live in tears forever—my nature will not bear it. Do, please, do let me find peace where I can. No one shall know. I shall not make you look ridiculous, dear. Let me find God in my own way. That's all I ask."

She took his hand and pressed it to her breast.

"I knew it would hurt you, Alfred, but something compelled me to do it. Our quarrels—Harold, I mean—you know—and poor Evelyn's trouble—then Ellen—and Ed. You left me alone to bear all that. It was more than my mind could stand. You have business, the House, and the war to think of, lots of things to take your mind off your family matters. Now, don't take it to heart. Remember it is my own affair, and I shall keep it entirely to myself."

He dare not speak. All he could do was to wave his hands hopelessly and turn away to the window.

"It's late," she said. "Good-by, I must go."

The car hummed away down the drive. He heard the horn sound like a low moan as the car signaled at the gate to turn into the road. A slight drizzle was falling, the trees were still, and the grass so green. He could see a patch of the drive far away to the left, and the figure of Ben walking briskly toward the house. Immediately he thought of the registration forms. Was Ben bringing them to him? A heavy sigh shook him as he turned away to go to his room. Passing the door of Evelyn's room, he heard her singing to her babe. He listened for a while and then went in.

"Dad, what's the matter?" Evelyn cried, with startled eyes. "You look awful."

He sat down on the bed and rubbed the baby's bare fat legs.

"Cricket, how long's your mother been thinking of being a Catholic—a Roman?" he asked.

"I don't know. Why?"

"She told me she is going to communion this morning."

"Well, if she is?"

"Ah, you don't understand—"

"No, I don't. I never could understand anything about that kind of thing. But can't she please herself, dad, what she does with her own soul?"

"Her soul belongs to God."

"I know. That's what I mean."

"But a Roman—"

"Can't a Roman give her soul to God?"

"God is not a painted plaster cast—"

"No, not any more than God is a dissenting chapel

or Harold's church. Leave mother alone, dad. She's going to be a happier woman. It's refreshing to find even one's own mother worshipping anything but the god of war these days."

She leaned forward, picked the crooning baby up and shook him joyously above her head.

"Here is my god. Look at him, dad. What sweeter heaven than his truthful eyes. Kiss him! There! Lord, you're bristly this morning. Now be off and shave."

Ben had brought the forms. A note from him said they were found under the table. Sir Alfred felt as he regarded them that Ben had hastened to get them out of the house. After breakfast Sir Alfred sent for his secretary, the immaculate Mr. Tring, and asked him to deliver the rest of the forms as he was feeling far from well. Mr. Tring, who was an expert statistician, readily complied, and clad in burberry and suitable boots started on his errand. The Sunday papers came on the ten o'clock train and interested Sir Alfred for half an hour. One contained a long article on the patriotism of dissenting churches, and incidentally, the great work done by Sir Alfred Horton-Birkett, Bart., M. P., in manufacturing munitions. When Ed joined his father the morning had become gloomy, and heavy rain soaked the paths and lawns. The outlook was cheerless, and it seemed as if they were in for a long wet day.

"Been over to see Herbert's gees at the farm," Ed said. "I wish Cricket would let me sell them. Prices are high, and they'll do no good over there eating their heads off."

"We're importing a lot of mules," his father remarked disconsolately.

"I know. What's in the papers?"

"Nothing much. It's going to be a long business, I'm afraid.

"Three years more, eh," Ed muttered, reading a paragraph pointed out by his father. "Hullo! here's something about you. Gas shells!"

Ed read the article through.

"I wish they could have done without that," he said, filling his pipe. "It's a great pity. Retaliation knocks the bottom out of the moral attitude we took up when the Germans used gas."

"We must do something," his father said in extenuation.

"Sorry you had to do it."

"Can't help myself."

"The girls and mother feel it terribly."

"I feel it myself. Nobody seems to think of my feelings."

"But can't you throw it up?" Ed asked.

"And leave our fellows to be wiped out?"

"They'll be wiped out anyway. If it isn't gas, it's muddle. If it isn't one thing it's another. All the nations are being wiped out. Look at the Dardanelles. It isn't war, it's scientific slaughter now. Everything is changed. We've had to swallow every single principle we started to establish. Lemnos and Salonika! Persia and the blockade. Then the black races. It is all hell gone raving mad. Get out of it, dad."

"I can't."

"What are you afraid of? The business? We

don't want it. Throw it up. I shan't touch a penny you leave. Really, dad—"

"But you've lived on munition money as you call it nearly all your life."

"That can't be helped. Still, I don't intend to live on any more."

"What keeps the house going I should like to know?"

"Munition money," Ed replied. "But I pay mother my salary for my keep. I pay her what it would cost me to live moderately in a good class hotel in town. It's the best I can do. I only stay here because of mother and Evelyn."

His father was too astonished to speak. He blew his nose violently, and wiped his eyes.

"Can't we make you understand we are in downright earnest about this business?" Ed asked gravely. "Don't think we're thinking so much of ourselves—we're thinking chiefly of you—of what you will suffer when it is all over. It seems to you the mind of the people will not change, that you will always be lauded as a patriot. Now you know, I'm no scholar, but since I've been home I've been reading what happened to governments who led peoples into war. It's interesting—very. When the war's over you'll have to reckon with our folk, and the reckoning will be a heavy one. I should think you'd see that as a politician. The other side seems to be pretty certain that your lot's out, when this is over, for twenty years."

"There's something in what you say, but the system has got me. It holds me fast. It wouldn't let me go if I wished to tear myself away."

"Ben says there is a way. It is merely an expedient."

"What is it?"

"Leave the firm and give all your shares to the wounded."

He watched his father closely and saw a new light in his eyes. A kindly smile spread over his face.

"You would have enough from the old coal and oil business to keep Crowington going moderately. Why don't you do it? You need make no excuse—just do it."

The light faded from his face, and he shook his head sadly. "But I must be worth nearly two million," he muttered.

"All the better. All the more for the fellows who shot the stuff away."

"I'll think it over," his father said with a deep sigh.

CHAPTER XVII

MAJOR COLNE and Billy were old friends. They were in India together for some time before the war began. When they met in Flanders the major was recovering slowly from a wound in the neck. Billy urged him to go home to recuperate.

"Go to my place, and my mother'll take care of you," said Billy, forgetting Clungford was really his mother's place, for she had saved it from the wreck of Billy's fortune.

Colne had been at Clungford for some days when Clarice heard him mention Jawton's name. Instantly she thought of Ed and wondered if Colne had any special information, news first hand, of the day Ed was wounded.

"Do you know Colonel Jawton?" she asked.

"Quite well. 'Brimstone' Jawton was in India when I went out seven years ago. Billy knows him."

"Did you see him when you were in France?"

"Several times. Do you know him?"

"No. But I heard about his regiment being cut up last autumn. I've often wondered about it."

"Bad business that," Colne said, compressing his lips and wrinkling his thin cheeks. "Very bad."

"What happened?" Clarice asked, fear tapping on her heart.

"Well, the fact is Jawton's orders were not carried out. He was in charge of reserves which were to advance at five in the afternoon. All his officers

had been given written instructions—everything was perfectly clear.”

“Were the orders given to each officer?”

“Each one by Jawton himself. Billy has the whole story from old ‘Brimstone.’”

“And what happened?”

“Well, not to use too many military terms, the center did not move and kept the wings back—”

“But the reserves moved ultimately—”

“When it was too late.”

“Terrible! Who was to blame?”

“Oh, what’s his name?” Colne pondered, tapping his toe with his cane. “Bir—Birkett.”

Clarice was afraid to help him. She kept silent.

“Birkett. Birkett—Horton-Birkett. That’s the name. Regular case of funk—nerves, I s’pose. Of course, the story’s common property now.”

“Do many men suffer from nerves—funk?”

“Heaps.”

“Then why is the—Horton-Birkett case notorious?”

“Suppressed the orders.”

“I see. There is no doubt about that, Major Colne?”

“None whatever. Of course, one doesn’t like mentioning these things. They’re not nice.”

Clarice yearned to ask why Ed was offered the Victoria Cross; why a funk, a man who had lost his nerve, should carry two men out of fire, but she refrained. There was lurking in her another yearning—to confront Ed with this man. To make Ed break his silence, to hear what he would say to it all. The thought of doing it grew in shape and completely

took possession of her. Her motives were strangely mixed, but she did not stop to analyze them. She wanted the matter cleared up, settled.

In the afternoon she drove Major Colne over to Crowington. He did not know where she was taking him. He was content to let his charming companion drive him, motor him and walk him where she wished. The major was deeply smitten. Billy had said little or nothing about his sister. She was a delightful surprise to a man who thought he was going to spend a few days with a lonely old widow. As they drove over the heath Colne admired his companion sitting up at his side, driving a stylish cob. She was pretty, strong and auburn. He glanced at her figure and liked the strength of her head and bust. "A deuced fine woman," he thought. As she turned into the drive she asked if he minded her calling on some friends. No, he didn't mind. She asked for Ed. They were shown into the drawing-room. Ed came, pipe in hand, hurrying to greet her.

"Clarice, old girl," he began.

"Ed, I've brought Major Colne, who is staying with us for a few days. He's a friend of Billy's."

Her heart sank. She saw the men bow, and noticed the embarrassment of the major who looked at her for her friend's name.

"Yes. Do sit down." Ed waved them to chairs.

"I didn't catch the name," Major Colne remarked.

"Major Colne, this is Captain Horton-Birkett," Clarice said timidly. Her heart thumped like a trip-hammer.

"Oh—y-e-s," Colne drawled, fixing his eye-glass.

"Perhaps you will tell Ed—Captain Horton-Birkett—what you told me this morning—"

"I beg your pardon. Isn't this rather unusual?" the major asked, not in the least flustered.

"I'm sorry, but—" The rest stuck in her throat. Ed saw she was in great distress.

"What is it, Clarice?" he inquired kindly.

She rose with difficulty, and steadied herself at the side of the piano.

• "It's about—about Jawton and the orders—"

"Well, go on, dear."

"Major Colne says you suppressed them—"

Colne raised his hand reprovingly: "Scarcely. I said it was the common report. Let us be accurate."

"I didn't," Ed said quietly, "but what does it matter now?"

This stung Clarice into energy again. She flashed a glance of scorn at him.

"What does it matter? Don't you care what they say about you? Major Colne says it was a regular case of funk. Was it?"

"No."

"You didn't suppress the orders?"

"That is obvious. Would I be here if I did?"

"And you take it all so calmly—"

"Yes. Did you bring Major Colne over to tell me what is said?"

"Y-e-s, I did," Clarice stammered in vexation.

"Very good. Now, Major Colne, proceed please."

Colne took his eye-glass out, put it in again and coughed.

"Perhaps you ought to know I hadn't the faintest notion I was going to meet you," he observed.

"Well. Here I am. Don't hesitate, Major."

"I have not—nothing—more to say. I'm sorry this has happened. I merely told Miss Clungford what I had heard."

"But, Ed—Ed," Clarice gasped, "won't you say it's all a lie—that Jawton lied?"

"No. I'll not discuss Jawton."

"You can't very well do that, can you?" Colne put in.

"Not any more than you can discuss any action you can know nothing about. You were not there. You only know what the army gossips say—"

"But why don't you put an end to the gossip by clearing yourself?" Clarice cried. "Ed, you don't seem to understand. You leave me open to meet these statements without a word. It is hateful of you. Have you no pride? Haven't you the courage to tell them it's all lies?"

He saw how deeply she felt the gossip. He knew how proud she was. And in his mind a short question, the one that he had borne for weeks trying to decide finally, kept putting itself to him: "Is it fair to ask her to share the new life?"

Here was a chance to put an end to it.

"I don't care, Clarice," he murmured wearily. "I am very sorry you are suffering for my—faults—very sorry, but I must take my own way of meeting slanders."

She went over to Colne and said: "I owe you an apology, Major Colne. It wasn't nice of me to bring you here this way. Please forgive me. I think we'll go now."

Ed opened the door for them, and bowed as they

drove away. It hurt worse than any wound. He noticed when Colne helped Clarice up to her seat that he didn't seem to mind what she had done.

On the way back to Clungford, Colne was very chatty.

"Strange man that," he said. "Always had a peculiar reputation. I remember a lot about him now. Could never get on with old 'Brimstone.'"

But he saw little of Clarice that night. She had a headache and did not appear at dinner. Lady Clungford, too, was not cheery. It was a dull night. Colne was out of temper, and thoroughly bored before ten. In leaving him, Lady Clungford said she always retired early.

"There's little to do here," she remarked. "But I hope you will not mind what we do. Just stay as long as you like, and enjoy the country."

"Thanks, Lady Clungford," he said, "but I think I shall have to go over to Minsterley to-morrow and spend a day there with some old friends—the Padgetts."

"Minsterley, eh? Well, take an old woman's advice, Major. Don't believe all you hear in Minsterley."

Colne left Clungford at lunch next day without seeing Clarice.

"Was Clarice here to-day, Ed?" his mother asked at dinner.

"She brought a man to see me—a Major Colne."

"Oh! What about?"

"Some gossip. About—well, never mind, mater."

"May I ask about Clarice?"

"Yes. But that is all over. Don't let us say any more."

"You don't mean you and Clarice have quarreled, do you?" his father inquired.

"No—there's been no quarrel."

"Oh! a—well—yes—" Sir Alfred muttered, watching Ed's face.

They ate in silence. Evelyn toyed with the silver between the courses. Her mother, full of the spiritual experience of the morning, seemed content. Ed drew figures on the cloth with the prong of a fork, while his father with hands clasped on the table seemed to sink deeper and deeper into his gloomy thoughts. It was a strange meal. All the gaiety and joy of the family board of some years ago were gone. Like shadows they sat without sense of the presence of the others. Not until they found their corners in the pleasant ingle of the billiard room did they rouse themselves out of their moodiness.

"Have you heard from Fred?" Lady Horton-Birkett asked.

"He's still in Ireland," her husband replied. "Very proud of his commission. He wants to go to the Dardanelles, but he thinks there's no chance at present. He's at the school of musketry, learning machine-gun work."

"That'll suit Fred," Evelyn said. "He was always keen on a mechanical toy. Didn't he want to be an engineer, mater?"

"Yes, before he went to Oxford."

"Robert is quite well again, I hear. He has been in a terrible battle—only four hundred and seventeen left out of one thousand. He wasn't scratched."

"Did any one look at the casualty list to-day?" Evelyn asked.

They seldom spoke of casualties. When the papers came each looked them over and said nothing about dead or wounded friends and acquaintances. They had lost so many. A tacit understanding had made casualty lists taboo.

"I didn't see the papers to-day," Lady Horton-Birkett said.

"I don't look at the names now," Sir Alfred muttered.

"They're very heavy. I just glanced at the list," Ed said.

Evelyn rang the bell and asked the butler to bring the *Observer*. Sir Alfred dozed off, and his head dropped until his chin rested just above the diamond in his shirt. He breathed heavily. His wife read a tract, and Ed blew rings of smoke from the bowl of his pipe.

"Jawton, Ed?" Evelyn cried, staring at the paper.

"Eh—yes—what?" her father mumbled, waking up suddenly.

"Died of wounds."

"Who—"

"Colonel Thomas Q. Jawton."

"What about him?" Sir Alfred asked, now quite awake.

"Dead! Died of wounds!"

"God bless us, you don't say so?"

Ed knocked the ashes from his pipe: "Poor chap!" he muttered.

Sir Alfred rose and stood with his back to the fireless grate. He watched Ed for a few minutes.

"Ed, I went to see Major Pomeroy-Fanton—some time ago now," Sir Alfred began.

"Where did you see him?"

"New Forest. He was taken there by his mother. Awful sight, Ed. Terrible! His mother wrote to me—asked me to run down—he wanted to tell me something. It was about Jawton."

"He spoke to you about Jawton?"

"Yes. Why?"

"He was under orders to say nothing about—about—"

"What happened?"

"Yes."

"Were you all under orders?"

"Of course."

"Well, perhaps he thought he might die. Anyway, he told me no orders came from Jawton that day."

"Did he?"

"He said that was for my own information."

"Have you kept it quite to yourself, dad?"

"Never breathed a word to any one."

"But why on earth didn't you tell Ed before this?" Evelyn demanded angrily.

"Well, I—I thought he would like me to keep it to myself."

The night was fine. After the heavy rain a fresh drying breeze blew from southeast, and the fields gave their odors to the winds. The leaves rippled in swaying rhythms, and the poplars in the park leaned their tops in nodding curves toward the flash in the western sky. Furnaces sent their flares upward to the heavens, Staffordshire way, where iron ran night

and day, and down the line to Minsterley a freight train rattled in and out of Penlow woods. The engine left a trail of flame behind. Ed turned his steps toward Bramble Lane, and climbed its steep winding ways until he reached Top House Farm, which stood upon a plateau two hundred feet above the village. The great valley spread north and south for forty miles at his feet. Cottage lights gleamed here and there, in clusters in the hamlets, and over Minsterley a soft glow hung like the reflection of a fading fire. It was a night to glory in. But Ed's thoughts were all of Clarice and what had passed that day, only a few hours gone when she brought Colne to see him. So Jawton was dead. She could not have known that. But did Colne know it? What might have happened had she waited another day? No, it was all for the best, hard as it was, she should think he had not the courage to defend himself from slander. She was gone. It was only fair he should not ask her to share his lot. He walked back around Clungford way, going down the other side of the hill to the heath, and met Harry Tonks heading for Crowington. They walked on for a mile in silence.

"I've been to see a friend near Edstaston," Harry said. "He's in great trouble. He's had to give up his church."

"Pressure?" Ed asked.

"Yes, of a kind. A colleague of his went into a factory to assist in making shells—"

"And his people urged him to do likewise?"

"No, but he received postcards telling him to do so. He's had to fetch his small family down here to his mother. Since he's been here he has been per-

sistently canvassed. He has his wife and three children, no income now, and a conscientious objection. His wife would rather see him shot than go."

"Pretty bad case."

"Yes. Hard—very. I'm afraid he's not physically strong enough to bear the strain. These men go down under it when their bodies are frailer than their souls. One man I know was bullied into going to a recruiting office. He was a gentle creature, strangely modest, excessively refined, but manly withal. The doctor, pressed for time, used him roughly, pushed him about as if he were a lump of dough and told him if his courage were only as sound as his body he would be worth a charge of shrapnel. He died about a fortnight after that examination. Brutality killed his soul. And he was one of the most brilliant electrical engineers of the young school we had. But war can't waste time in coddling the sensitive. War must have its food, tender or tough."

"Have you heard much about what is called 'suicide'?" Ed asked, referring to the stories about some of the men, forced by brutal, economic and social methods to enlist, who decide to be shot and not shoot.

"Yes, a good deal," Harry replied. "A certain society kept a list of the names of men who enlisted to get out of the soul struggle, and in three months over twenty men out of four hundred were killed."

"So many?" Ed gasped. "That's awful."

"Derbyshire, the delegate who went to The Hague last February, came back with a report from a German Socialist—a woman—that many of her fellow

countrymen practised 'suicide.' I believe it is done to a very considerable extent. A friend who gives his evenings to local Red Cross work in a big city told me some fearful stories he had heard from the wounded. A sergeant, of the Earl's Own Foot, who had been out from the beginning of the war, said several of the men of that regiment stood up, unable to bear the strain any longer, to be picked off by snipers."

"The revolt of the soul, eh?"

"It's the only way out."

"How will it all end?"

"In death—spiritual death."

They parted in the village. The lights were out and only the sound of the wind in the trees was heard. Between the gusts the stillness was deep. Ed turned northward and soon left the village behind. Night lay gently over the hamlets and fields, and the soul of the world sighed over the dreaming women and old men who grieved in their sleep for the lost.

The registration forms were delivered and into every cottage fear spread like a disease. The old feared for the young, and the young puzzled how to answer the questions. Only men devoid of all knowledge of cottage life in the country could have framed such questions. Ed and Ellen had to assist many people in filling up the forms. "Are you skilled in any other work?" was a bureaucratic conundrum which caused more head scratching than all the puzzles that ever came into Crowington. It was a busy week for Ed and Ellen. News spread quickly over the countryside that the captain and Mrs. Ben

knew the answers to most of the questions, and they were called in to help numbers of cottagers out of their difficulties.

A man of sixty stopped Ed on the road.

"Capt'n, would yer mind? I be sore troubled. Them papers beat me. What be I to do?"

"What's your age?" Ed asked.

"Sixty—come All Souls' Day. But will they take me to fight?"

"No, no. All you have to do is to answer the questions."

"But what for, if they dunno want me ter fight?"

"Just to have a record of available men and women."

"Be women going to fight?"

"No. Women may be wanted to work in certain factories."

"My ould woman?"

"How old is your wife?"

"Sixty-two—gone midsummer. But her's worse en me with rheumatics—asthma, too. And what'll the grandchilder do?"

"Have you to look after your grandchildren?"

"Aw. Four on 'em. Their father's at front, and their mother's dead. Three o' my lads joined the army. Two's at front, an' one's at Masham training."

"Where do you live?"

"At cottage above Hill House Farm."

"I'll come up this evening and help you."

"Thankee, Capt'n, it'll be a mercy."

Ed found the work of exceeding interest, and the simple folk appealed to him. He gained their con-

fidence, so hard to win after generations of oppression.

Several mornings after his interview with Clarice and Major Colne he received a letter from the head nurse at the hospital in France where Jawton died. It was a strange document. The address was blocked out by the censor. It ran:

"Dear Sir—

"I have spent many hours with Colonel Jawton who died last night from terrible wounds. He never lost consciousness. I think it is only fair and right to tell you what I learned from him concerning you. The censor here consents to my making the statement to you, but he says I must not divulge it to any one else.

"Colonel Jawton said he was entirely to blame for the mishap in which you were wounded. He forgot to give the order to the reserves. An order had been given and revoked and a new order issued, but owing to the shortage on the staff he got confused. The rapidity of the attack on the first line, and the miscalculation of German strength and preparedness, were the causes of the chaos. The colonel was for some time under the impression he had sent the new order down, but a long time after he came to the conclusion he must have been thinking of the first order which was revoked. This has troubled him more than his wounds.

"My friend Nurse Wilkin attended you at Hospital _____ (censored) and told me about you and the gossip of _____ (censored). So I hasten to let you know what I heard from the colonel. Nurse Wilkin has given me your address and wishes to be remembered most kindly to you.

"Sincerely yours,

"Margaret Eames Browne."

What an amazing mess and muddle all war was! Ed thought. And it was for this millions of men of Europe were drilled and thrown into action. The victims of incompetence, seeking victory through paper military plans made by shallow minds, wading through the chaos of blood and grime to the triumph of slavery and economic woe.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE villagers of Crowington assembled early at the doors of the Institute. Word had come to them that the parishes round about had been persistently canvassed for three days, and the farmers had been urged to fetch up their men to hear the great speakers. The people of Crowington were not going to take a back seat, not likely, at their first real political meeting and let the folk from beyond the village fill the front forms. For an hour before the appointed time for opening the doors over one hundred men and women stood in the gravel path which led to the steps of the building. There were many more women than men, and the men were not of military age. Shopkeepers and parish functionaries mingled with the laborers and pensioners. As the hour wore on they were added to by farmers and their workers from farms lying some distance away. Jennis, of Heath Farm, had brought in his milk cart three of his men. Boulton, a grazier, had driven in two, and old Mrs. Fox of the Vale House, came in her wagonette with three, a wagoner, a cowman and her coachman.

There was room enough when the first rush was over, and though the Crowington folk were in first they did not get front seats, these being reserved for the gentry. Then others dribbled in in twos and threes. The younger men either stood at the wall at the back of the room, or sat quietly on the back

bench. Those in the body of the hall spoke in whispers; there was less animation than to be found at church before the prelude. Lady Clungford and Clarice were the first to take reserved seats; Mrs. Harold and her sister followed, from the anteroom. When Ed stalked into the hall few noticed him for he took a seat at the back. Ellen and Ben, too, were content with seats near the door; they did not see Ed, he was sitting on the other side of the hall. Every now and then Ben rose and surveyed the audience. He could see no men of military age in the forms in front of him.

"How many have they drummed up?" Ellen asked.

"About a dozen, I should think," he ventured, "and they seem to be nearer forty-five than thirty."

"Did you see the recruiting officer from Minsterley in the yard?"

"Yes. He asked a man to join—"

"Did you hear what he said?"

"No, I didn't catch his reply."

"He said, 'Ask sumon who anna got a wife, a mother and six little 'uns to fend for.'"

"Harold will not land much of a catch after all his hard work?" Ben said. "What a business! Seventy-five per cent. of the audience women and very old men. The farmers don't look pleasant about it."

The speakers filed on to the platform. After a moment's hush a few people in front applauded. Old General Pennett was a favorite, a kindly sportsman and what was called a "good landlord." Mr. Jevons Oldcastle was a surprise to most of the people. They had seen photographs of him at elec-

tion times, but the full figure of the original was quite unlike the picture on his election address. He was much older, fatter and heavier than they expected. The champion of conservatism at close quarters was no fire-eating politician; Mr. Oldcastle indeed was a mild-looking, short-sighted gentleman of seventy-two years. He was accompanied by Mr. Ruggles, the well-known orator, who had made speeches on nearly every important question which had appeared in British politics for a generation. Of him it was said that he could make as good a speech for either side, as his necessity required. The question of the hour was his bread and butter, and for not much of those necessities he was ready to throw the whole weight of his oratory on the side which appreciated his skill. The Reverend Harold Horton-Birkett and other county notabilities made up a platform of various degrees of merit.

General Pennett was blunt and breezy. He did not know why Crowington, of all places, should be chosen for such a meeting. It seemed to him unnecessary. There were places, if the newspapers told the truth, where there were "slackers" by the thousand. Crowington had done its best and could not spare more men. The farmers had been obliged to work night and day to get the harvest in, and what the devil they were going to do about plowing only the gentleman with the pitchfork and tail could tell. The general was delighted to meet his dear old friend, the member for the division, whom he had not seen for seven years. On rising to address his constituents Mr. Oldcastle explained how

the great affairs of the country kept him constantly at Westminster watching and waiting to turn the Government out of office. At least that was his position until war broke out. Since the Coalition, of course, like every loyal Conservative, he had given the Government his unqualified support. Lightly he touched on the many great domestic questions laid aside for the time being, then he dealt with the need for conscription and high explosives. He did not mention the Kaiser, atrocities and the Russian all-conquering retreat. (It had been arranged in the anteroom that these matters should be left to the rhetorical Mr. Ruggles.) For over half an hour Mr. Oldcastle spoke as if he were addressing an empty room. The audience listened in silence, many of them noticed the general nodding in his chair, and some took strange interest in the bored expressions which settled on the faces of the people on the platform.

Relief came in the shape of a telegram which was passed up to the general. The incident brought the speech of the member to an abrupt end, and he sat down. On calling on Mr. Ruggles, the general announced the telegram was from Sir Alfred Horton-Birkett who had missed his train connection, but hoped to reach the meeting before nine o'clock.

Then Mr. Ruggles gave the drowsy people a taste of his quality. He launched into an examination of the Kaiser's international police-court record. It drew tears and laughter from the unsophisticated, and amazement from the educated. His accounts of the marvels of the German spy system were engrossing. He mentioned a long list of men who had

lived in England, eating the food of royalty, and the aristocracy, taking great British honors, laying concrete foundations for Krupp guns, buying the best of the country's horses, stealing the plans of arsenals and dockyards, and sneaking into the offices of the state departments for the purpose of learning our military and naval secrets. After reciting many deeds and familiar names he came to that of Count Herbert Von Holst.

"You ought to know all about it. You 'ad one of them here. 'E was a beauty. What did 'e call 'imself? The 'unting chap that started his little game early in life—at school here, and then at our university. As big a scoundrelly spy as to be found in Europe. Count 'Erbert Von 'Olst—"

"That's a lie!"

The shock was terrific. Mr. Ruggles did not turn pale because a statement of his had been called a lie. Many a time in his career he had been called a liar to his face without turning color. But at such a meeting! It was a wholly unexpected challenge. How was he to suspect the presence of any one bold enough at a meeting in a thoroughgoing Conservative village to give his statement the lie? There was commotion on the platform and much hurried whispering. Harold was motioning frantically to the general who sat up and glared fiercely at the confused and stammering Mr. Ruggles. The audience showed no desire to help him out of his embarrassing predicament; they sat silent but intensely interested.

"Who—who—who says—it's—a—a lie?"

"I do." Ed rose and sat down all in one moment.

"So—do—I," said General Pennett, with emphasis on each word.

Harold rose and went to Mr. Ruggles. He whispered something. Those in front said it was a fierce whisper to the effect that Mr. Ruggles should drop that, and get on with something else. The damage had, however, been done. To be called a liar by two soldiers, one in the audience and the other in the chair, was too much opposition for the orator. He resumed in a floundering choppy sea of observations, but never recovered his control. Harold longed for him to sit down, he prayed for Sir Alfred to come to the rescue. He saw the meeting getting out of hand. His friends on the platform turned to one another and chatted in whispers. For half an hour he endured the agony of the politician who sits and sees an important meeting swaying over to the other side. Ruggles had been told to speak for an hour, and as speaking for an hour was his bread and butter, he stuck at it with a bravery little appreciated by those who look for it only on battle-fields. The general passed the time drawing squares and circles on the agenda paper, and Mr. Oldcastle studied his engagements in his note-book.

Sir Alfred was just in time to save the meeting. He came in breathless, as if he had run all the way from Minsterley instead of riding in his motor at forty miles an hour. Mr. Ruggles sat down while the audience applauded Sir Alfred, who stood bowing acknowledgments with an ease that proclaimed his familiarity with such incidents. The general called on him to speak at once. Then without note or reflection he dealt with the military situation as if he

had just returned from all the many fronts from Bagdad to Soissons. Sir Alfred tried to make clear the provisions of the various acts, such as the Munitions Act and the Registration Act. His explanation was simple, but it failed to rouse enthusiasm. Neither piece of legislation seemed to concern the audience. The laborers of military age at the back of the hall were relieved to learn that the registration forms they had filled did not mean they would be taken away to fight for their native land. Sir Alfred ventured to remark he hoped there would be no need for conscription. He was opposed to all forms of compulsion. Anything which might divide the country was to be avoided at all costs. The hour was dark. They had suffered terribly, but there was a silver lining to every black cloud. More men and more munitions were urgently required, and these would be forthcoming. He had no more doubt of that than he had of what the end would be. Victory would come to British arms, because the cause was just. God would not forsake His own. Western civilization would triumph because it was the highest the world had ever known, and its Christian ideal the noblest man had yet reached.

It was a good speech, sound in its principles and wise in its expediency. The art of omission was practised without fear of detection. When he sat down the general took his hand and chatted affably with him until he forgot to call on the next speaker. Mr. Oldcastle joined the group and patted Sir Alfred on the back. It was a delightful thing to see all party strife laid to rest. Harold, who was down to move the resolution, waited impatiently for some

moments. After seeing some people at the back move toward the door he sprang up and shouted: "The meeting's not over. Wait, please. I have to move the following resolution."

The resolution welcomed the National Registration Act and pledged the meeting to support the Government in introducing effective measures to bring the war to a speedy and successful conclusion. Harold began by saying the hour was late for a country audience, but that he would not detain them long. To fight such a war the army must have men and munitions. He had gone about a good deal making recruiting speeches because he was convinced it was his duty as a Christian to help to overthrow the godless philosophy of modern Germany. But when he saw millions of young men hanging back it made his blood boil. There were thousands of slackers and shirkers, he was sorry to say, who would rather soak themselves in beer and do everything in their power to prevent the factories turning out ammunition, so badly needed by our brothers in the trenches, that he sometimes despaired of the end. General Pennett had wondered why this meeting had been held in Crowington. He would try to explain. He had a list of thirty men of military age living in the parish who had not enlisted. It was shameful. If there were one hundred parishes in the west counties containing thirty men that meant three thousand probable soldiers, and so on. It was not fair to the men who were crying out for support against unscrupulous foes who had been preparing to crush us for over forty years. He could name men living in their midst who ought to be in khaki. Only a

few days ago he saw one—a Mr. Harry Tonks—loafing about—

“Put the resolution and sit down,” Ellen cried.

“I will not—”

“Name the others,” Ben demanded.

“I will please myself—”

“What is keeping you? Why don't you go?” Ed asked.

That evidently had not occurred to Harold. He was visibly embarrassed. But only for a few moments.

“I am a clergyman, and my duty is here among my parishoners. If I were free I would not hesitate for a single second. For God and the Right I should seek any death. It would be a holy duty to fight against the Mammon of unrighteousness. And let me tell you—particularly those men hanging about at the back of the hall—that it is better to go now than to wait to be fetched. What is there to fear? The soldier's life is full of honor and glory. If I had not been a clergyman I would have been a soldier. There is no greater service man can do than defend his country. At the front you will find men full of nobility and sacrifice. The Government pays them well. There is separation allowance, something for the children, pensions, and every conceivable compensation. Now, you men, will you volunteer? The recruiting officers are here. Is Mr. Harry Tonks here?”

Ben rose.

“No, but his brother is, and I think we have heard quite enough from you, Vicar. You have specially singled out my brother and some men at the back of

the hall here. Why I don't know. That is something only you can explain."

General Pennett was not a good chairman. He allowed Ben and Harold to enter into a discussion without calling for order.

"I have the floor. Sit down," Harold shouted.

"There is a limit to procedure when an audience is taken advantage of as you have taken advantage of this to-night. You have brought a man here to speak that is an insult to the intelligence of men, even men who dare not protest. You sat and listened to statements that you knew were false until your brother and General Pennett showed their disapproval. Now I want to tell this audience before you make another appeal for recruits, that conscription is not yet." Ben turned about and faced the audience. "Men, you must consult your own consciences. Do not let yourselves be bullied and brow-beaten by any one into fighting when you do not wish to. By signing a registration form you do not pledge yourself to enlist. If you do not want to enlist there is not yet any law that can force you. You have given your brothers, sons and fathers. Crowington has done its share—"

A recruiting officer and a policeman moved from the door to the place where Ben stood speaking calmly, deliberately. The policeman touched Ben on the shoulder and asked him to come outside.

"You're arrested," Harold cried.

"I know. Arrested for interfering with your recruiting meeting, Vicar. I'm not taken by surprise."

After they took Ben from the room Ellen rose.

"I should like to appeal to General Pennett. Is there any law that can force a man to enlist?"

"No, there is not," the general said, "and I hope there never will be. But there is a law that deals severely with people who interfere with recruiting. I dislike most of the methods of getting men to join the colors; they are not manly, and go against the grain. But no matter what the methods be, every man should consider solemnly his duty to his country."

"Thank you, General," Ellen said. Then turning to the men at the back of the hall she said with emphasis. "You heard General Pennett. Remember! He said there is no law can force a man to enlist. Remember what my husband said, and take my advice, 'Don't be bullied by parsons and parasites.'"

She left the room. Every eye followed her to the door.

"'Er's a good 'un, and 'er big wi' child," a woman muttered to her husband.

Harold was quickly on his feet again.

"When I was interrupted I was making an appeal for recruits, and I said I had a list of men of military age who ought to go. Now I wish it were possible for me to give you an adequate idea of the glory and honor of the soldier's life. We read our history, and know the lives of our martial heroes. But history fails to tell of the glories of the humble soldier. I saw in an article in a review last month that a famous writer said, 'Every battle is a thrilling glory bringing undying honor and praise to every man who does his duty.' But that does not picture

to my mind the fulness of glory. No one has ever satisfied me—not in literature, or painting, or music—with a picture of all it means—”

“Really, General Pennett, are we to sit and listen to this drivel?” Ed cried in a passion. He could endure it no longer. In trying to keep himself in check he tore his glove in strips. To see Ben arrested was hard to bear.

Harold stood his ground. He was determined not to give way again.

“General, please try to keep order,” he appealed.

The general shrugged his shoulders and said, “It seems to me a domestic affair not a public meeting.”

“If I may suggest?” Sir Alfred interceded, rising with some humility. “It is late, and perhaps the resolution might be put, and the meeting brought to a close.”

“Certainly, Sir Alfred,” the general agreed.

“But I won’t take long,” Harold cried. “I have my duty to perform, and if everybody did their duty—”

“Duty—duty—duty,” Ed cried. “What do you know about duty? I’m sick of your twaddle. You want a picture of the glory of a battle-field. You can’t find it in literature, painting, or music. I’ll tell you what the picture is. It is bloody, shattered men who never quarreled themselves staggering in droves to death. It is men full of healthy life sent into a hail of tearing metal. It is an officer crying, ‘Follow me!’ and the next instant his headless frame marching on. It is his men blinded by the spattered flesh and blood of that head. The glory of it is to meet your bosom friend face to face in a hell of

shrapnel. To strike an opponent you never saw before down at your friend's feet. It is glorious to hear the cry of a great love come from the heart of an outraged man. I met Herbert Von Holst face to face the day I lost my hand. I met my sister's lover—the man I had loved as a brother—enemies—fighting like animals. Harold, go and learn the glory of hearing in the midst of battle a friend cry out for your sister whom he loved. Go and see the lifeless trunks and hear the hideous moans of limbless men. Walk into the hail of machine-gun shot. Go, Harold, you'll see the picture. Go, before you ask another man to go where you've not been yourself."

He sank down trembling with passion, angry with himself for giving way. He was humiliated in his own eyes. A horrid feeling of shame covered him. The general slowly rose to his feet and in a shaky voice said:

"It is a pity this happened. I'm sorry, 'pon my soul. But I can't blame Captain Horton-Birkett. I have an idea of what he's been through. Perhaps it would be better if clergymen didn't meddle with soldiering. The cobbler should stick to his last. I suppose there's nothing more to be said. Now, you better go home and get some rest. Good night."

The general walked off to the anteroom, and the audience rose. Clarice stood by her mother irresolute. Her strong desire was to rush back to where Ed was sitting, and beg his forgiveness. Sir Alfred lingered on the platform chatting with Mr. Oldcastle. The room was emptying fast. Harold found his wife and helped her on with her cloak. Ed sat bowed, his head on his arms, and as the room be-

tween him and Clarice cleared of the villagers she saw him.

"Mother, I must go to him," she said.

"Can't for the life of me know why you ever left him," Lady Clungford muttered.

Clarice went and sat beside him. She looked at his bent figure, bowed sadly.

"Ed—Ed—look up," she whispered. "Forgive me, old man, I'm so miserable, Ed."

He took her in his arms.

"Say you forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive, old girl," he said.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"What?"

"About Herbert—that awful day."

"I couldn't, Clarice. I ought not to have mentioned it now. But I tried to keep quiet. I tried to hold myself in. Never mind. It's done now. There will be a fearful row about it, but I don't care. I'm done with the sickening business."

"What row will there be? Jawton! Do you mean Jawton?"

"No, Jawton, no, old girl. Why? Jawton is dead. He can't—"

"Jawton dead."

"Yes—died of wounds some time ago. Now we're free to say no order came to us that day."

"Oh, God, Ed, you knew that and didn't tell me?"

She stared up into his face, her lips trembling like cherries in a wind. Her hands clasped about his neck, and her firm bosom pressed against his shoulder as she twined round him to catch his eyes.

"Ed, why didn't you say so?"

"Because—because Jawton put the blame on me, and there it had to rest. But now he is gone. Pome-roy-Fanton told dad that no order came from Jawton. If there was any one to blame it was Jawton himself. He should have used his discretion. But being one of the old school he never dreamed of taking the initiative. It was hard for him to see his men cut up, and as he was a peppery person at all times, and disliked me very much, it was only natural his wrath should fall on me."

"And he let you live under that cloud—"

"Never mind, old girl, it's all over now."

"Come home with me, Ed," she begged.

Clarice lay in bed next morning wondering what it was that prompted her to sympathize with Ed. She was so happy she wished to live the events of the night over again. Not until she heard Ed's booming voice giving the lie to Ruggles did she know he was at the meeting. It was then a subtle something thrilled her, a wave of sympathy, coming from she knew not where, enveloped her. She felt like crying, and anxiously wondered where he was sitting. His voice filled her with a strange feeling of wanting to touch him. The rest of the meeting had little interest for her. But it was Ed's reference to Herbert and Cricket, his meeting Von Holst face to face, and the description of Herbert's cry, in the roar of battle, for his love; it was that which subdued her, made her wilt like tissue-paper before hot embers. Somehow it was like Ed crying to some one for his love—for herself.

"Well, my lass," her mother said, when they met

at breakfast, "you look better. That's right. There's nothing like it in all the world. Love's the tonic, isn't it? What time did Ed go?"

"It must have been one o'clock," Clarice replied. "And I think Morris was glad to wait up and drive him home.

"Now, get married at once, Clarice, and be sensible about it," said Lady Clungford. "Don't bother about the usual business. Everything's changed. Let it be done quietly—no fuss—no advertisement. I'm tired waiting for a man to come to this house, and I'm not old enough to be pensioned off, though I'm not young enough for high jinks. It'll do me good to see you happily settled."

"All right, mother, you shall have it your way," Clarice said. "I'll see Evelyn about Wilmslow Lodge—"

"No, don't bother about that. Come here after you've had a fortnight in Scotland. Billy is away and I shall be lonely—no hunting, nothing going on. Billy will never live here. I'll attend to that. Think it over and be practical."

Ben was taken to Minsterley, there to appear before the magistrate for interfering with recruiting. The sentence was a severe one: three months in the second division. The magistrate was influenced by the action the authorities had taken against Ben's pamphlet, *To Conscientious Objectors*. A stay of proceedings was asked for and refused. The option of a fine was not granted. The witnesses for the prosecution were men carefully chosen from the audience. Ben declined to call witnesses in his behalf

and pleaded guilty to the charge. Harold was summoned to appear, but he sent a doctor's certificate instead.

Ellen was stunned by the severity of the sentence and was taken back to Crowington much shaken. She had to think of a life not born. After a day or two she resolutely faced the ordeal of doing all she could to maintain her strength. Ben told her she was not to think of him; she was to save herself in every way; there were to be no journeys in to see him; no anxiety, no tears. How brave she was in those days only Ed and Harry Tonks really knew.

CHAPTER XIX

THE news of the death of Count Herbert Von Holst came to England via Rotterdam. His mother sent her letter to Evelyn by an attaché to a neutral embassy. The message was so precious the young man undertook to deliver it in person, but on reaching London he was told it was several hours' journey down to Crowington and that it would be better to send a line to Miss Evelyn and find out if she would be there to receive him. He wrote to her saying he had a letter from Count Herbert's mother which he must deliver into her hands; a letter so precious that he would not rest until it was safe in her keeping. Evelyn showed the polite effusive note to Ed, who guessed instantly what news the letter contained. Evelyn saw it in Ed's face. She took the thought from him, and turned cold, ashen. He strove to soothe her by saying it might not be serious—wounded again; ill, perhaps!—something of that kind!—not—! Their nerves were all raw, Ed said, and they jumped to conclusions—often the worst. But Evelyn sat in abject despair, crying, "Herbert! Herbert! Herbert!"

Next evening she received the letter—a long one. The first page was enough to convince her that Herbert was no more. Ed took the letter from her clenched hands. While her mother tried to comfort her, he stole quietly away to read it. It said Herbert was horribly torn by a shell. His legs and one thigh

were completely severed. There were wounds nearly all over the rest of his body. So the doctor who saw him a few hours before he died wrote to his mother. They buried him in France near what had been a village church, a few miles north of Loos. His mother wrote saying her son's one long year of agony was at an end. All through the war he carried one awful thought that he might kill an English friend, one with whom he had gone to school, one perhaps he had loved in those bright days when his friends on English soil were many. His mother had kept all his letters for Cricket and she would let her have them some day.

The letter was as painful a document as Ed had ever read. The German woman of English birth and blood wrote without a single reference to her own grief. She said nothing of her own suffering, her own loss. There was no complaint, no censure, no word of remorse. Deep, terrible, unavailing despair ran all through its contents. What was the use? Why try to understand it all? God had left mankind to perish. The war was an affront to the Holy Ghost. Mercy and pity had been banished forever from the souls of rulers and statesmen. Hopelessness was the only thing left whole in the slaughter and destruction of men. Her husband had said hell was a place of refuge and ease in comparison with the world, and Satan hid his face in shame at the evil of it all.

When Sir Alfred came down to Crowington to see Evelyn he was anxious and out of temper. He had put off meeting his family for several weeks fearing a rupture. Ellen had written twice about

Herbert's death and had not spared him in saying what she thought about the shell business. Fred had gone to the front, spending only a night at Crowington en route for a southern port. Sir Alfred saw him off at Victoria.

Things were all wrong in London, the Government toppling to a fall, the conscriptionists making hay in every direction, the truth about the Dardanelles fiasco leaking out, and the newspaper war raging more furiously than ever. The Budget had pleased no one. It was a frontal attack on the laboring classes, and a reversal of the fiscal system which had been maintained by the electors at three general elections. There was much in town to vex Sir Alfred, there were dissension and bitterness at Crowington. Many times he had wished he could get away from it all for a while and take soundings. That his wife had gone over to Roman Catholicism was a bitter blow. A Roman, he muttered, whenever she came into his mind. "I, live with a Roman! Perhaps to see her at her mummeries and counting her beads." No doubt she would be repeating to herself "Hail Marys" and "Paternosters" while he was talking to her on domestic affairs. Thank God, no one knew of her conversion—that was one blessing of the war, folks were too busy with other things to listen to affairs of that kind. She had written several times since Herbert's death begging him to give up all his interests in armaments and munitions. Evelyn had said she would never speak to him again until he was free of the horrible business. During the journey from town he wished for rest, for time to think

—wished for new plans as he never wished before, but he knew, he felt, he would find little rest at Crowington. There seemed to be a vast accumulation there of errors, things undone, domestic blunders, for which he was held responsible. Had the war found him out? Had his whole life been based on an utterly false system? Somehow events were shaking the edifice of his career, rocking it in the cyclone of woe, straining it to breaking point, in an upheaval which shook the very foundation of his family relations. He saw no welcoming gleam of light to lead him out of the chaos. Was he a victim of the system?

Ellen came to dinner. It was the first time for many months so many as five had gathered at the table. While the servants were present they talked of the things which did not matter. Evelyn sat like a beautiful ghost. Bereavement enhanced her attractiveness. Her father's eyes strayed every now and then in her direction, but he might have been in London for all the notice she took of him. He was deeply sorry for her; he wanted to say so, but she gave him no chance at all. She sat like the personification of all the pain munitions had brought to the lovers of men slain in their strength.

"I thought Fred looked very well when I saw him off," he said. "He's grown into a fine fellow. Did you see him, Ellen?"

"Yes, he was here for a 'day and a night," she replied.

"Alfred, I feel sure he didn't want to go," Lady Horton-Birkett said. "I was not deceived by his bearing. What do you think, Ed?"

"He was very brave about it, mater."

"Poor boy," Ellen sighed.

The dreary meal ended, they hastened away from the servants and found seclusion in the billiard room before the fire. For a long time they sat in silence not knowing how to begin the discussion of all the vital matters which had occupied their thoughts. Now they had their father in their midst they did not know what to say to him. It seemed so easy to write him, but now far from easy to talk to him. Ed thought of a dozen ways of making a start, none however seemed kindly. At last he began, "Thought any more of that matter?"

"What matter, Ed?"

"About giving up the business."

"Oh! That, eh? Y-e-s, a good deal."

"Well?"

"Can't see how it can be done. Very difficult, my boy. It's the system. And—really! I'm a victim of the system—"

"We're all that—victims of the system—"

"What is God doing—the dissenter's God—can't He help you?" Ellen asked. "Surely He has not deserted you, has He?"

"Ellen, I don't like such levity. It is not becoming," her father said, brushing the cigar ash off his trousers.

"Not becoming? What do you mean, dad? Have you turned your countenance away from Him? I thought you had the greatest confidence—"

"I have. I have. But—"

"Yes, dad, go on."

"It's no use," he muttered.

He shook his head gravely and laid his cigar aside.

"Alfred, I do wish you would give it up," his wife said. "You must, really. Think of Evelyn—Fred!—Robert! It is so awful. I can't sleep thinking about it. It is so horrible, the idea that your shells might—"

"Might?" Ellen echoed.

There was a tense silence. Each buried in thought, so lively indeed that their minds transmitted the hidden sentence to Sir Alfred in unmistakable terms. He raised himself by taking hold of the arms of the chair, he leaned forward, and looked earnestly at each of their faces.

"You don't mean—?" he blurted.

"We think, dear, one of your shells perhaps blew Herbert to pieces," his wife said.

"Nonsense!" he cried, and stood over them shaking with fierce indignation. The horrifying thought angered him intensely.

"How can you think such a thing?"

"What do you make the shells for?" Ellen asked quietly, laying stress on the *for*.

"Isn't it best—or better—to be quite certain about it?" Ed muttered. "Besides your German firm—"

"My German firm. I have nothing to do with any German firm. That is no part of our business now. The war has changed all that. It has severed all connection—"

"Your patents are used—"

"Stolen—"

"Dad, dad," Ed remonstrated testily.

"Well—I—I mean—"

"We know what you mean," Ellen said. "For the time being relations are broken off, but only for the period of the war. When it is over the German house will have to account to you for the whole business done during the war. That's what you mean."

"Give it up, Alfred," his wife cried. "Oh, give it up. Suppose Fred is killed. Have you no sense of—" She broke down and wept bitterly.

But no one heeded her. Tears in that house were now part of the day's pain.

"You're all against me," he said hoarsely. "All against me. You don't—none of you—appreciate all my difficulties—all my terrible anxieties. Public opinion!—you haven't the faintest conception of what that means to a man in my position—not the faintest. The Government—there again! What about the Government? It never leaves me alone. I have to do what I am told. Then the country—I must be patriotic. I must do my duty. How can I leave the country in the lurch in a time like this? It is all very well for you"—he swept his arm over them—"to sit down here far removed from the life I lead in town and think of what I ought to do. Never mind, it is not to be expected you should know my difficulties. But it does seem to me like ingratitude after all I've done for you."

"It does, dad," Ed said quickly. "You're quite right there. It does seem like ingratitude. I admit it—frankly. But we are grown up now and must judge for ourselves. Some of us never had a serious thought until a few months ago. I know I didn't. I accepted everything without a word. That was because I had never been trained to think."

"You went to far better schools than I."

"I don't think so. I went to schools where thought was for teachers, not for scholars. A rotten system, I call it, that sends lads out without—excuse the word—a fundamental. We have been reared at snob schools to exist in a snob world. I can't think of a blessed thing I learned at school that can hold me up in face of a great crisis—a difficulty in which the soul must dominate. I'm preaching now, but I don't mean to. It's because I can't express myself clearly. I wasn't taught to. And soldiering is not the work for that kind of thing."

"I didn't want you to be a soldier," his father snapped.

"I know. I know that. But what else was there for me or for Robert? Our education pushed us that way to improve our social position. The army is the only way for sons of rich plebs to get into the swim. The army and the Church. Look at Harold. Is he any better than I am? You know you're just about as proud of him as I am of myself. Just parasites. That's what we are. Not one of us has an honest man's trade. We produce nothing, industrially or artistically. Art! The school system is enough to kill any desire for art."

"And, dad, what has been the good of coming down here, and setting up in squire business?" Ellen asked. "You haven't got in with the county families. They dislike you now as heartily as they did when you bought the place. After all these years you are still an outsider."

Stung to the quick he rose and clenched his hands before him.

"I never wanted them. I loathe them all," he cried. "They're nothing but a gang of sycophants ready to use you for what they can get."

"Not all, Alfred," his wife interposed. "Not all."

"Most of them. It's your lot, too. It was your idea. You were the one to cringe before them—"

"Cringe! Never!" she said with spirit. "All I wished was a chance in good society for my children."

"In good society," he sneered. "The betrayers of the country. Look at them! With their houses and parks, insanitary cottages and mortgaged palaces, half-starved peasants and over-gorged pheasants, their idleness, and the laborers' toil. Have they changed in character? Are they not the same stock that bled the country white a century ago?"

"That's a bit sweeping," Ed said.

"Read Byron, and Shelley, and—what's his name? Sweeping! You read them."

"The radical is not quite dead, after all," Ellen said.

"But why try to imitate them, dad?" Ed asked.

"Set them an example. The Small Holding Act is a fizzle here as you know. Why not divide up the whole estate into five, ten and twenty acre places, build houses and let the people in at fair rents? I've figured out the whole thing."

"That would be a very serious step to take," his father said emphatically. "It would cost an enormous sum."

"Where would you get the men from, Ed?" Evelyn asked.

"Yes. There! You see how impractical you are!" his father exclaimed.

"Men over fifty could be found. And, dad, it

wouldn't cost as much as you will make on this war. Would it? Fifty houses for small holders."

"Dad, do think of it," Lady Horton-Birkett pleaded. "Say you're ill. Stay down here altogether. Keep away from London. But give up the business. Any excuse will do. I am sure the money will be a curse to us. In a way it has been already. We are all disunited. Do give it up."

"Well, Evie, I've been thinking it over a good deal since I was down here talking to Ed," her husband said. "I shall never have a better chance of getting out."

They drew up their chairs and narrowed the circle.

"You see the market is high—inflated, in fact. It is just the time to realize. I might off load a big parcel—"

"Good!" Ed exclaimed.

"But wouldn't that make every buyer of shares an extra person interested in the sale of shells?" Ellen asked.

"Of course it would," her father cried, throwing Ed a glance of scorn.

"Never mind. Never mind," his wife said. "Get rid of them anyway."

"But would it be wise to let the small folk get their fingers into that pie?" he asked.

"I don't want you to do it that way," Ed said. "Put all the money into benefits for those who have suffered. I've thought it out. You can't withdraw your patents, but you can decline to take any more profit. You must do what the Government demands as long as you are the head of the business, but the Government can't make you hold on if you really wish to withdraw. Do you really wish to give it up?"

"I want a rest badly."

"Come down here and we'll look after you, Alfred," his wife said. "Come down and try to understand our point of view."

I will. I'll attend to it on Monday when I get to town. There is a board meeting next week."

He took his wife's hands, raised her up and kissed her.

"Cricket, darling," her mother called, "be kind. Say something. Dad will give it up."

Evelyn went to him and touched his cheek. He shrank from her lips as if he had been touched by ice.

"It was your shells, dad, that did for Herbert," she sighed. "I can tell that from Adorable's letter. She is bitter—bitter. If you would only feel that some German boy—like Fred—"

She stopped suddenly, choked by a great sob, and rushed out of the room.

Ed took Ellen home. Harry was busy on the plans of houses and outbuildings for small holders. He and Ed had been at work for some weeks on the plan of breaking up the estate, in the way he had suggested to his father.

"Our scheme may come off," Ed said, looking over Harry's shoulder.

"I hope I shall be able to see it through."

"Well, my father may do it."

"I don't mean that. I went into Minsterley to-day to get some materials—some special pens for this kind of work, and a friend told me he had heard on excellent authority that the authorities are preparing to start conscripting unmarried men."

"No!"

"He says his information is correct."

"There'll be revolution," Ellen muttered. "Did you ask about Ben?"

"He is quite well. Our friend says he will be released in about ten days—"

"Ten days," she cried.

"His sentence has been commuted considerably," Harry explained. "Albert Henry Vaughan is dead."

"My little Tommy," Ed murmured, remembering the journey from town when he came back wounded to Crowington and was assisted by Albert Henry.

"Yes, died of wounds," Harry said. "Mrs. Vaughan is very lonely. Minsterley is an awful place these days. Women and old men. There seems to be no youth in the town. It looks grayer than ever. Just young women, numbers of them, and grave-looking males past middle life. I met the recruiting officer who had Ben arrested. He asked kindly after you, Ellen. Poor fellow, he felt that keenly."

Ed stayed for a long time discussing the plans with Harry. Lizzie got sandwiches and hot milk for them. Harry was a deep well of information from which Ed drew copious drafts. He was really the first well-informed man he had been in touch with closely. Already he had introduced Ed to *Paracelsus*, his first experience in Browning, to Hardy's *Jude*, and *Tess*, to the Bible, for Ed knew next to nothing about it, and then to the book which gripped Ed as none other did, George's *Progress and Poverty*. This work made Ed understand Tolstoy's *Resurrection*.

CHAPTER XX

IT was no easy task Ed set himself when he decided to test Clarice by telling her he meant to give up all claim to his father's estate. Since the night of their reunion he found his love for her grow deeper and stronger. Was she so wedded to an existence of luxury and ease that a complete change in living, such as Ed contemplated, would affect her love for him? Would he lose her? These questions harassed him daily. She had eighty thousand pounds of her own, and her mother had taken over Clungford, not a very large estate, when Billy had to settle up for his expensive youthful pleasures. It seemed so selfish to Ed for him to want her to throw in her lot with his when he was fixed in his determination to make his own living and keep his expenses within his income. Yet there was something strong in Clarice which made him eager to lay the new scheme before her, something virile which tempted him to test her in a big way.

They were returning from the sale of some of Herbert's horses, when Ed said: "How would you like to run a little stock farm, beginning with hunters?"

"Wouldn't it be ripping," she said.

"You think so?"

"Indeed I do. I've been wondering for weeks what I could do to make a living—"

"What? You?"

"Yes. Do you think Ellen is the only one who dare think of earning her own living? Listen, Ed! Ever since Ellen told me about her life I've been mad to do something for myself."

"Splendid."

"Won't we all have to buckle to when the war's over and give up the other life? Living well and doing ill?"

"Old girl—that's fine."

Then he unfolded his plan. And as he went into the detail of starting a stud farm she saw how it could be done on a larger scale. Her eighty thousand pounds was enough to buy Wilmslow Lodge and stock it. Herbert's champion hunter was young, only six years old; they would have him valued and buy him from Evelyn. As fine a sire to be found in the country; fit for any stud farm. Ed did not like the idea of using any of her money, but she was firm and wore his objections down.

"Why can't husband and wife be partners, I should like to know?" she said. "You have the knowledge, Ed, and I have the money. We shall both have to work. You will have to run the whole thing and make it a success."

"But if it should fail and I lost your money?"

"Well if it did? That would be my affair, wouldn't it? Anyway, I want Wilmslow Lodge if Cricket will let us have it—"

"I'm afraid she won't sell, but she'll let it to us."

"Herbert has left her all his English interests?"

"He settled everything here on her when they were engaged. About five thousand pounds a year it comes to, and Wilmslow. Now, old girl, I shall have

nothing but about one thousand pounds a year to fall back on. You know I'm not going to touch dad's money."

"Ellen told me all about that. So you have decided to take half of Haugmond from Cricket?"

"Not unless I fail. That is something to fall back on."

When they told Lady Clungford of their plans she was as keen, enthusiastic, as they were themselves.

"Lord, it is good to hear of some one wishing to produce something of use. I don't know of a blessed thing in my life worth recording, outside the mere domestic habits of the wife and the mother. Things every woman is supposed to do because she is a woman. The sheep-like virtues of our sex. That's right, Clarice, make up your mind to live. After this war there'll be a big change in the affairs of lots of us loafers. Look at this income tax assessment I've just received. And the prime minister says we may have half our incomes taken from us before it's over. Well, good luck to you both. If Ed can't make a success of a stud farm I don't know who can."

They were married in Edinburgh and spent a fortnight in the Western Highlands. Each day they worked for several hours on the plans of the farm. Their recreation was walking, long tramps in the moldering paths of the autumn scented hills, looking down on tranquil lochs mirroring the gray trunks of beeches and the fluttering leaves falling from boughs growing bare. The weather was soft and calm under clear blue skies, and the smoke of forest fires rose in straight spires in the stilly air. In these

journeyings Clarice sounded the depth of his understanding. What a change had been wrought in him! It was like as if she had never known him before the night of the recruiting meeting. They talked of men and their books, of life and conditions of people, of striving and doing, of learning how to live industriously. It was Ellen, it was Harry Tonks, sometimes it was Ben, who set him to work to use his mind. That mind which was never taught to express itself, never to think for itself. The day he told her of Harry Tonks, Clarice saw deep down in Ed the real man that had been suppressed by class education. There was something fine in his appreciation of Harry. Educated at the village school, and what a school! He worked by himself at home at night and fitted himself for the larger scheme of a technical course in Manchester. There he got a job in an architect's office at fourteen shillings a week while he studied the classics. For five years he worked at Greek and Latin, German and French.

"My last year at Sandington cost more money than was spent on the whole of Harry's education," he said. "He knows the economists and the historians, and I doubt whether all my tutors knew a fraction of what Harry knows in economics and history. Better class education is an imposition which only an uneducated class would tolerate. Take the Bible. For years I thought it was priggish to talk about it. Where I got the idea from, heaven only knows. Anyway, I knew nothing about it until Harry Tonks brought it out to tell me where I could find a true and full idea of what life should be. There is to be found the great cry for justice,

and it does not shirk a definition of justice. Harry taught me that. Some day I will get him to give you his conception of Jesus. Funny, isn't it, we should talk about these things?"

"It sounds very strange, Ed," she murmured.

"Doesn't it? Like talking about another world. I wonder why it is we have that feeling that the Bible is taboo in good society. Seems to me we daren't face it. A line of no compromise is against the so-called genius of our people. All or nothing sounds like rank anarchy, and a society which makes laws and observes only its own order will not accept any infringement of its comfort and privilege."

In the quiet evenings he read to her. He had taken with him his copies of *Paracelsus*, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, and *Progress and Poverty*. It was a strange honeymoon, but one Clarice would not have exchanged for the most romantic one she ever heard about. His deep seriousness and great strength of purpose inspired her.

"You make me feel I want to read all these books, but I'm afraid I'm too much of a dunce to get out of them what you have," she said. "You must be a Harry Tonks to me, Ed."

"If I could only be a Harry Tonks!" He smiled and shook his head. Such an aspiration was beyond his capacity he thought. "It's too late for me to go through the mill. It's what you learn in the struggle for a cultivated existence which does the trick, old girl. It gives you so much—thoughtfulness, kindness and breadth of view. These things are essential if you wish to live with sense and understanding. You know, Clarice, I never realized that

laborers and cottagers were human beings until a few months ago. Then I got to know what their lives were and tried to put myself in the place of a man with a family on sixteen shillings a week for twelve hours' labor a day, in a cottage of three rooms, with unsanitary conditions, and all herded together in unhealthy places. Why, I couldn't do it. It would kill me. And yet these are the people whose labor keeps us in idleness."

They passed through Glasgow on their way back home. There they found a grave state of affairs. There were many strikes, the most serious being a rent strike. Hundreds of women and children marched in processions through the streets in protest against the landlords who were raising rents in the poorest districts. Some of the placards carried in the processions bore humiliating texts:

WHILE MY FATHER IS A PRISONER IN
GERMANY THE LANDLORD IS ATTACKING
OUR HOME.

Another read:

OUR HUSBANDS SONS AND BROTHERS
ARE FIGHTING THE PRUSSIANS IN GER-
MANY. WE ARE FIGHTING THE PRUSSIANS
OF PARTICK.

The sight of the denizens of the one-room-and-kitchen dwellings of Glasgow shocked Clarice as no amount of reading possibly could. She burned with indignation as she watched the procession pass.

"I must see for myself where these people live. It is shameful."

Ed took her to the four- or five-story tenement blocks, entered by a close, in a great congested district where the mass of workers lived. An energetic woman of some social service organization led them through the labyrinths. The children! The utter degradation of it all! Clarice could scarcely believe what she saw. Her anger wore her out, and when Ed got her back to the hotel she was extremely tired and sad.

"Yes, old girl, there is the real problem," Ed said. "And we can spend nearly two thousand millions on trying to put Germany right on treaties, militarism and godlessness! It's grotesque, perfectly grotesque, isn't it?"

"What is to be done?" she asked.

"I don't know quite. Tolstoy says, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and its justice.' Justice is the first step to be taken."

"Ed, we must do something. We must never go back to the old life. If you ever find me slipping, falling back, you know, forgetting, you will make me keep straight, won't you?"

"And you, Clarice, you'll watch me, too. Keep me up to the mark?"

The weekly reviews read on the journey back to Clungford told them Britain had fallen on evil days. The conditions at home were most discouraging. One set of papers bitterly opposed the agitation for conscription, in another paper one set of politicians warred openly against another set; the Government was fiercely assailed for its conduct of the war; the Dardanelles was a hopeless, fruitless task and the Government was urged to give it up before worse

disaster followed rash cruel blunders. Generals at the front were made the targets of departmental incompetence; and the people were torn with dissension. The Munitions Act was severely criticized in many quarters, its administration condemned; and the Defense of the Realm Act was used to oppress the poor while it permitted the rich to defy its provisions. The outlook was black. And the cry of "more blood, more blood," was the only call which seemed to have the ring of unanimity in it.

An article in one of the reviews staggered Clarice's sense of fairness. She read it to Ed:

"It is high time some organization should take in hand the defense of persons charged under the Defense of the Realm Act. Last Saturday, at Blackpool, a commercial traveler was fined one hundred pounds or three months' imprisonment, for having said something in casual conversation in a railway carriage alleged to be 'likely to cause disaffection' and 'likely to prejudice recruiting.' As the trial was in camera, we do not know what were the terrible words that were uttered or how they came to be reported. But it opens up a vista! We have all heard things said in railway carriages and also in club smoking-rooms, 'likely to cause disaffection,' and these may now, it seems, be reported, without being taken down in shorthand, to 'the competent military authority'; with the result, *if the culprit is poor and friendless*, of a summary conviction by any two Justices of the Peace and a vindictive sentence. The public is not at all aware of the number of prosecutions and convictions of this sort that are taking place. Some repressive action of the kind may well be necessary, but it is significant that it is only 'little' people against whom proceedings are taken."

"Ed, that is monstrous."

"It is war. Ministers must not be criticized by the little people who find the money and feed the cannon. Western civilization must be maintained, and liberty secured though the Continent be engulfed in blood."

While they waited in Liverpool for the artificial part of Ed's right hand to be fitted, they saw a ship-load of men leave the landing-stage. Ed did not know where they were going, but he knew what they would see. From the dock wall they watched the companies of young, rather immature-looking lads, march down the gangways. Their faces gave the lie to their expressions of gaiety shouted to friends in the crowds who lined the roads. Some whispered they were off to the Dardanelles, some said Greece was their destination.

A rough, seamy-looking fellow on the curb caught sight of an acquaintance and called out; "Ey, 'Orace, where to, me 'earty?"

"Somewhere in 'ell, I s'pecs," was the reply from the soldier who immediately started to sing *Land of Hope and Glory*.

"Let us go back, Ed," Clarice said sadly.

They reached Clungford the next evening. There Ed found a note from his mother asking him to run over to Crowington to see her. He knew she had bad news. His mother seldom wrote to him, but when she did the letter was usually long and chatty. This note was brief and contained no expression on his home-coming or reference to the honeymoon. After dinner he and Clarice drove over to see her. The news was only a day old. That morn-

ing Sir Alfred had written saying he had been informed by the War Office that Fred was in the list of missing.

Ben was released and back again in the village. He seemed physically none the worse for his imprisonment. Mentally, however, he came back more strongly determined to oppose compulsory recruiting and the cruelties of vindictive magistrates exercising the powers of the Defense of the Realm Act. Harry had been persistently persecuted since Ed had been away. Letters now came to him daily from men who acted blindly, asking him to consider his duty. The crass impertinence of any "competent military authority" or "civil or clerical recruiting agent" asking Harry Tonks of all people to consider his duty struck Ed as one of the sublime features of a country going raving mad. Ed's interest in his friend was so deep he found no excuse for the writers of letters who had no time to consider the sensibilities of individuals.

"What does it matter, Ed?" he said, "as long as I'm not afraid of myself—but I shall not give way. After all, if thy hand offend thee cut it off. I don't believe in self-mutilation, but anything is preferable to wilful mutilation of others."

"There'll be more of that," Ben said, "if they start to put their cowardly threats into action. Read that letter you received from James Packard and let Ed know to what depths they can descend."

Harry took a letter from his desk. It was from a well-known non-conformist minister in a northern

town, a man who had been publicly recognized for some years as a leading pacifist. He was married and had a family.

"Packard writes," Harry began, turning over the pages of the letter: "It is conceivably possible that some of us who have tried to keep loyal to our consciences and the cause of peace may before long find ourselves hounded from our pulpits and our families. Incidentally, it appears that some ministers of religion are not to be counted, because of their profession, exempt from military service. One hundred years ago they emptied the prisons to find soldiers, now— Anyway I myself have received letters from a recruiting peer asking me to consider my duty, and I shall presumably be canvassed with the rest and invited to enlist. But, as you may guess, my attitude is fatally and irrevocably fixed. I simply will not be compelled in any way to do what I have not seen it for myself to be my duty to do, and so far as I am concerned, the compulsionists may do their worst."

"Nice, isn't it?" Ben mumbled.

"There may be a lot of shooting done at home before long," Harry remarked.

Ed could find nothing to say; he was humbled, shocked beyond expression.

"The Government is finding it difficult enough to cope with the problem of self-mutilation," Ben observed. "Four men were tried for it the other day at Manchester. We haven't any idea of the extent it is done. They keep all that out of the papers. But we get some information through one or two non-resistance societies."

It was in the ensuing weeks Harry found himself the target of almost insupportable persecution. Every day anonymous letters containing white feathers and scurrilous epithets reached him. He was assiduously canvassed and openly insulted. One day he was overtaken on the road and badgered by a neighboring squire who, in lieu of argument, spat at him from his motor and then drove off at a rapid pace. Harry told Ed about the incident when he reached Clungford.

That was the day before Harry disappeared. Lizzie said he ate his breakfast, read his letters, looked at the morning paper and went out for a walk. That was all she knew about him. Several days passed by and no word came to Crowington. But letters for him came regularly, and twice recruiting officers called. Ben thought he had gone back again to work at the hospitals in Manchester. A fortnight passed and Harry did not return, and no word came from him. Ed was sorely troubled, and Ellen was afraid something very serious had happened to him.

CHAPTER XXI

BEN was back in London working on his paper when he was called up by telephone to speak to Sir Alfred. He wished to have a chat with him and asked if Ben would dine that night at the club in Pall Mall. Ben thought it was a strange place to ask him, a prison bird, to visit. He, however, accepted the invitation and promised to meet Sir Alfred there at eight o'clock. Later in the afternoon there came a telegram changing the place of meeting to a restaurant in Soho. Ben smiled, knowing Sir Alfred had reconsidered the matter for expedient reasons, and replied confirming the new place of meeting.

"Been back in London long?" Sir Alfred asked, when they were seated.

"About a week."

"How is Ellen?"

"Very well—quite happy."

"Good—very good. No news of your brother?"

"None whatever."

"Strange—isn't it?"

"Yes."

They ate in silence for some time. The restaurant was not crowded, and the people were strangely subdued. The lights were low and the orchestra gone. The life of the cheerful place was missing.

"I've had a letter from Ellen which has upset me," Sir Alfred said, bending over his sweetbread.

"What is it about?"

"Well—a good many things. You see she doesn't appreciate the position in Parliament. She thinks I can if I wish get up any time and slate the Government. Absurd, isn't it?"

"What is it she objects to?"

"Oh, the Defense of the Realm Act, the Munitions Act and goodness knows what."

"Well, something should be done. I'm busy on an article now dealing with over twenty cases of poor men who have been most vindictively treated for making some remarks which are passed unchallenged in most of the day's newspapers."

"Yes—yes, I know, Ben. It's enough to make one's blood boil. I've had a case in my own constituency. A very fine young man—a pacifist. Working in a Government factory. Three months for saying the German working people felt no hatred for the British working people. But what can I do? Parliament as it was doesn't exist any more."

"Yes—martial law in the House—well, martial law is no law. And so the House is impotent to deal now with the grievances of individuals. I know Ellen feels the position keenly. I think the House might as well shut up. It would be more dignified."

"It would—it would, I agree," Sir Alfred nodded.

"It is the first time in our history the Commons have been reduced to complete impotency. The blackest crime, mind you, of all the discreditable business and one the people will never forget. Why, even the *Times* feels obliged to warn the Government that dissatisfaction with the working of the Munitions Act may bring new and grave labor troubles. The power given to employers to refuse

a man his charge, while on the other hand, an employer may dismiss any man at any moment is an intolerable curtailment of personal liberty. It is an outrage, and those of us who know the working class are utterly amazed at their enduring such detestable tyranny without revolt."

"They're marvelous—"

"Yes, but we out-Prussia Prussia in every particular. For myself I must say that no Prussian government could possibly exceed what ours has done in tyrannous laws. The working classes have been traduced freely by ministers to take public attention from their own blatant blundering. You know that. They have been called drunken slackers and loafers. One minister is asked to apologize for many statements which are now proved to be lies. No one out of his own class seems to have a good word to say for the millions who have squandered their kin and their labor and their earnings on a war in which they have not the interest of a tinker's brass button. My only hope is they will remember this time."

"You're very severe, Ben. Of course you see it all from a different angle. And then you have been very badly treated—"

"No—that doesn't affect my opinion. Ellen holds the same views and she has not been imprisoned—"

"But Ellen! She has always been an extreme anarchist—or something. She is against all governments. Even in Germany she helped the Socialists on the quiet. But I do wish you would tell her what the real position is. Her letters worry me fearfully. You know how bitter she can be. In this

one I got this morning she says I am a traitor to God and man."

He looked pathetically at Ben for some time, waiting for a word of sympathy.

"Now isn't that going too far? Isn't it, Ben?"

Ben looked up and stared steadily at his father-in-law. He seemed so pitifully childish, so temperamentally flabby and irresolute, that Ben could scarcely repress an inclination to sneer.

"No—I don't think so," Ben replied, keeping his eyes fixed on Sir Alfred.

"You don't think so?" he gasped. "A traitor to God!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"I once heard you preach a sermon—or was it a speech on the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man—"

"Yes, yes," Sir Alfred put in, "at the Albert Hall."

"I think it was. Anyway, at one of your great conferences. The week before you made that speech your shell factory declared a dividend of fifteen per cent., and you only a few days before spoke in the House in favor of a greater naval program. Now, I consider a man who makes shells and urges the Government to take extra millions from the poorest of the poor for war purposes is, when he tells folks he believes in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man a traitor to God and man. But you don't seem to appreciate that. You can not see our view-point. You see nothing inconsistent in what you say and do. We see contradiction and inconsistency in nearly all you say and do. You have asked my opinion. There it is."

"You're candid—really?"

"Did you expect me to be sympathetic?"

"I thought you would see how difficult it is for a man in my position to be—well, consistent."

"I see no difficulty. Either be one thing or the other. Don't try to be religious in business. Can you serve God and Mammon?"

"God and Mammon?"

"Yes! Can you?"

"Do you mean a man pursuing a legitimate business can not serve God?"

"I mean what I say. Can you serve God and Mammon?"

"Really, Ben—"

"See. Are you engaged in a productive business?"

Sir Alfred smiled his blandest and spread his hands out like two fans waving flies off the spaghetti, growing cold between them. He shrugged his shoulders slightly and made no reply.

"You know it isn't. You know every pound for your shells is wrung out of the taxpayers. You know your business thrives on destruction. Even in times of peace you prosper on programs which are fostered by international hate and envy. Can you serve God and Mammon?"

"I serve my country."

"Then why don't you say so? Ellen says you're a private-pocket patriot. Six years ago she wrote to me saying you were that. You serve your country! Well, in what way? You have made an enormous fortune out of the taxpayer. What have you given in return? Look at the casualty lists."

"Surely you don't hold me to blame for—"

"Ellen says you and other armament makers are very largely to blame for all the trouble, and I think she is right. Your international connections have been at the bottom of most of the Jingo orgies of the last ten years."

"I have never lent myself to—"

"You never entered a protest—did you?"

"I couldn't see my country left defenseless—"

"Defenseless! And dividends at ten and fifteen per cent. And what is your country? A land that belongs at most to one million and a half people—seventy-five per cent. of it owned by a quarter of a million—out of forty-six millions? Which is your country? That of the comparatively few land-owners, or that of the forty-four millions of landless creatures which pay over fifty per cent. of the taxes and seventy-five per cent. of the rates?"

He was silent. He tightened his lips and twiddled a spoon on the smooth cloth.

"Mind, this is not my seeking," Ben explained, going on quite calmly. "I didn't want to say these things to you. It's only because I want you, now you've opened the subject, to understand Ellen. I know you think the world of her and that it galls you to know she hates your business and can not sympathize with your political position. You are unhappy because she will not take a cent from you. But don't make any mistake about her attitude. She would starve—gladly—rather than touch a penny of what she calls 'blood money.'"

He winced and hung his head.

"That's what she has called it for years—long before the war began. You make me think some-

times you are under the impression she will change when the war is over. She won't. Make no mistake. You know she will have a baby very soon now. Do you know she means to make that child promise from the day it can speak never to take a penny piece from you?"

His head went down into his napkin, and he pushed the plates away. Ben saw his great shoulders heave convulsively. The sight of the burly man in grief fascinated Ben. For some time he watched him striving to control himself, and as he saw him search for his handkerchief a great pity surged up in Ben's soul for the man who had gained the world but lost the love of the child he worshiped. He stretched his hand across the table and laid it on his father-in-law's arm: "Come, come, you can make it all right, if you choose."

"How?"

"Give the whole thing up and snap your fingers at public opinion."

"I can't—I can't—I'm in—too—too deeply. You don't know what you ask. None of you understand. It's easy enough for Ed and Ellen and Cricket to talk, but—but only the other day—at a board meeting I said I thought of retiring, and—and, well, you should have heard them."

"Well, if you will be the slave of your board I suppose you must be its slave. Can you expect a nature like Ellen's to have a particle of respect for a slave?"

"No, Ben, no. And I hate myself—I loathe myself for not having the courage to—give it up. Think of my life now. Up here living at a club. Really

—I sometimes feel like an outcast. My wife—my children—well, I haven't the pluck to see them at Crowington. And now Fred—missing. The news about Fred has quite upset me. I can't sleep. He told me when I said good-by to him we should never meet again."

For a while they were deep in thought. Each forgot the other. Ben's mind was fixed on an article he had begun on the change brought about by the dearth of officers. The casualty lists had been extremely heavy. For ten days over one hundred officers a day had been killed and wounded. Ben thought it was time to democratize the army. Sir Alfred thought of his wife, and the day Fred was born. He remembered Evie saying she would not be able to nurse him.

"What do you think about democratizing the army now?" Ben asked, breaking the long silence.

Sir Alfred started and looked up.

"You mean the shortage of officers?"

"Yes! Something must be done. Don't you think so?"

"But will it be necessary for Parliament to act?" Sir Alfred asked. "You see, men are going up from the ranks every day. The whole character of the officer class is changed—for the time being. When it's over the aristocracy will regain its hold over the army again. It's their preserve. But haven't they done magnificently?"

"Yes, very well," Ben said. "So they should. That's the least to be expected of 'em."

"Oh, come, Ben, be fair. Don't let your prejudice cloud your judgment. The working class. Yes, of course. I admit they have rallied splendidly. But

after all, where should we be now if the aristocracy hadn't plunged into it to a man?"

Ben looked at him for a moment with an expression of pained curiosity and then burst out into a strange laugh.

"You don't mean it, do you?" he inquired. "You don't think there is any comparison to be made, do you? Then you do surprise me. You must have been reading the articles in the *Morning Mail* on 'What England Owes the Aristocracy.'"

"I have, I admit it," Sir Alfred nodded.

"The most one-sided view I ever read," Ben remarked. "See, Sir Alfred. In the first place a man in a case like this must stand on his own feet whether he is of the aristocracy or the working class. Each has a life to lose, each has a soul to save. Who will say the aristocrat makes a better soldier than the artisan? Long lineage will not serve a man in the trenches any better than unknown parentage. Moreover—and don't forget this—there are not enough aristocrats to make a couple of full battalions of fighting age. You don't call nineteenth century creations aristocrats, do you? Captains of industry, men risen from the industrial ranks, do not lose their origin when they are made peers. Give due to each, be fair to peer and peasant. Peers have much to fight for: land and the privileges which go with its ownership. They rule; peasants serve. Don't think I'm prejudiced. Not a bit. But rank has its obligations—at least it had a couple or so centuries ago. The deuce of it is, however, battles now can't be fought by aristocrats, so those who serve must shoulder the gun to save the ruling few. Isn't it so?"

"Quite so. You're right, Ben. Go on. It seems like old times hearing you talk this way."

"Well, just compare the two: there goes the aristocrat, born to great wealth. If he live one hundred years it may not be necessary for him to produce one useful thing. He is provided for. Land, labor and capital are his in abundance. That is the rule."

"Usually, it is so. Yes."

"Socially, he is accepted. Art lies at his hand if he desires its wonders. Now! There goes the peasant, born to a long life of daily toil. He has no land. His labor is for hire. He lives often enough in a tied-cottage. A weekly tenant, whose religious and political principles frequently dare not be expressed openly."

Sir Alfred broke in: "Right! By heaven, Ben, you're right."

"Then capital can not be amassed out of the savings of a weekly wage of fifteen or twenty shillings. I put it high. Socially, the peasant is an outcast. Art! That is not for him. Leisure is essential if art is to be enjoyed. Now, I ask you: are their chances equal? Do the risks balance?"

Then lowering his voice: "Are the stakes comparable? No! A thousand times no! Patriotically, the peasant is handicapped out of the race from the time of entry. Isn't it so? Then, there it is. Tell me. When both march out to fight, which is the greater patriot?"

"The peasant, Ben, the peasant."

"Patriotism should begin with equal rights. Let that be so, and I don't care a tinker's cuss whether class distinction exist or not. I say, to the ranks—

every one who wants to fight. Let peer and peasant serve equally, if there be no other way. But both must begin as Tommies. Tommies all I say—if there be need for an army. Thank heaven, the old twaddle cackled about the necessity of having an aristocrat for an officer has been silenced forever in this affair. And let me say this: our British Tommy is the bone, sinew, soul of the army. Don't make any mistake about it. His spirit, his doggedness, his sense of pal-ship, his cheerfulness, and, above all, his sublime sense of humor, are the finest traits to be found in common man anywhere on earth. Why? Because each one has a latent sense of liberty. The mass are not conscious of it yet. But down deep somewhere in his make-up, the British lad has a feeling for liberty. In that respect the peasant is of longer lineage than the peer."

"Ben, you make me feel I am a traitor to my class—my origin," Sir Alfred said, shaking his head sorrowfully. "Ben," he laid his hand upon the arm of his companion, and looked earnestly into his face, "Ben, if my old father can know of the change in my principles, if his soul is conscious of what I am doing, he will never have a happy hour all through eternity. It troubles me night and day. And of late I've thought of my old father so much. Yes, I am no more worthy to be called thy son. I know that. Oh, God, I know that. I am conscious of disloyalty, and craven enough to remain so. Here it is; man is the weaver of the web that is to trap him. I'm trapped, Ben—trapped!"

The old strain struggled up in him for supremacy. It was that solemn moment when a beaten man can no

longer crush down the best in his soul. It had been pressed down, thrust away into a dark recess, then ignored, then reviled; tortured, smirched, scorned, and derided, but—never destroyed. The best clung to him like an undying love, enduring everything but death.

"Yes, Ben, my old father would have gone to the stake singing hymns of joy rather than desert his people, or sacrifice one jot the principles of liberty," he whispered in fierce gusts of passion. "We have forgotten the great ones of the past. The poor needy heroes who won for us those liberties that fields of military valor never gained. Your grandfather, Ben. He is of the true British stock. It cut me to the very heart, that night, to have him—him!—tell me what I am. I thought I heard my own father's voice admonishing me. Him, to censure me. I'd rather ten thousand priests flay me naked in public for my sins than sit under your grandfather's scornful eyes again."

Ben left him at the club. He was worn out and very shaky. What a lonely man he seemed mounting slowly the dark steps in the gray misty night. So it was utter loneliness which made him ask Ben to dine with him that evening. How strange, Ben thought, and how like a personification of the nation's family. He turned toward the Strand to spend an hour or two at his office before going to that room in Bloomsbury where Ellen let him know she was his.

Suddenly many shafts of light shot up into the cloudy sky. Then a terrific explosion, followed by deafening volleys from air-craft guns. Far up Ben

saw part of the Zeppelin pass behind a cloud, traveling in the direction of Hampstead.

It was a cheerless, gray, drizzling morning and the leaves fell heavily with a sodden thump upon the ground when Harry Tonks left the village. He had read in the day's paper that all unmarried men would be called up after the end of the month owing to the failure of the voluntary system to provide the weekly quota of recruits. The news wounded him deeply, for he thought of the many friends who would be affected by the step, men who would rather die than submit to compulsion. The only thing worth living for that had not been taken away by the Government was the voluntary system, though in practise it still existed only in name. Economic pressure had served the purpose of conscriptionists almost as well as compulsion by act of Parliament.

The shock he suffered when he was spat upon on the previous day completely unnerved him. In a moment every fine instinct vanished and his blood boiled in frightful torrid gusts, filling him with a raging heat. For a second or two he thought he saw blood. He felt capable of springing on his torturer and tearing him limb from limb. It was perhaps the sudden transformation in Harry's appearance that sent the squire of Westlongdale away in his car at full speed. Harry was tall, strong, muscular, when aroused; the bent, moody, student-like looseness, which was his usual manner, was suddenly effaced when he held himself by the thoughtless; but when he was inspired by a self erect. His aloofness and gentleness might have been taken for the demeanor of the physical coward

new idea or on hearing some happy news, electrically he changed and was full of spiritual fire and strength.

That he was capable of feeling the murderous instinct even under gross insult shocked him immeasurably. Was he so frail? Could he not trust himself under great provocation? Suppose they came to him and compelled him to enlist, would he submit rather than endure the consequences, and perhaps the military conclusion, death? All night he lay awake pondering the great question. Am I my own self's? or the State's? Is it my body or my soul? Which? What will be the good of an invincible territorial empire to me if I kill a fellow man? These questions could have but one reply. I am responsible for my actions—the State is nothing to me.

And when he passed from the village and plunged into the woods which rose up the hills over Crowington his thoughts were shattered by the news that unmarried men would be called to the ranks after the end of the month. Long months of suffering had shaken his disposition. The work in the hospitals during the winter took much of his strength, and the incessant badgering to enlist while he remained in Manchester left him somewhat weak. His life in the village had been one long struggle to save himself from spiritual prostration.

He rambled on and up, avoiding the paths, hardly conscious that he was forcing his way through thick briars and tough undergrowth. He did not notice his torn clothes and saturated feet. The drizzle fell in wavy sheets in the openings, and where the trees were dense great drops spattered down upon his head and shoulders. The cry of a startled pheasant, the

scurry of rabbits, the whirl of partridges and the fright of darting squirrels, passed unheeded. Harry neither saw nor heard the things which had always drawn him into the woods. His soul sank lower and lower into himself, and his body grew so heavy he stumbled and staggered under its weight.

Near the top of Clungford Rise, which looks down upon the heathery heath of black moss, Harry came to a clearing where some foresters had been at work. The day was too wet for them, but about rude blocks, tree stumps not rooted up, lay fagots and many cords of firewood. By the side of one of the blocks lay a big, heavy trimming knife. Harry sank down on the block, and took up the knife. It was a cumbersome weapon. For a long time he sat and handled it, trying to cut bits of thick twig with his left hand.

"If thy hand offend thee," he muttered.

Minutes passed, long intervals in which he sat motionless, plunged in deep gloom, oblivious of the rain. Once a robin lit upon his boot and whistled his short shrill autumnal song; then flew in swift darts away to the branch of an oak. A spasm shook Harry and he stumbled up from the block. In his left hand he gripped the handle of the knife. He knelt down beside the stump and bared his arm. Then he laid it with the palm of his right hand spread over the block. Twice he aimed at his wrist. And then with all his remaining strength he drove the knife down. The blood shot up into his eyes and he swooned away. The blow had struck aslant his knuckles and gashed the back of his hand.

When he recovered consciousness it was raining heavily. The pain was enough to keep his mind active.

He rose and stumbled on through the brush; sprawling and rising, he went head down like a drunken wretch impelled from the back, until he fell over the rocks. His head struck a boulder lying on the mossy bed of the small ravine in the hill, and he knew no more pain.

The rain washed the blood away from the stump and cleaned the knife. And when the clear sunny morning came the old forester returned to his work of chopping and trimming the boughs into piles of logs for winter fires.

CHAPTER XXII

EVELYN yielded to Ed and let him have Wilmslow on a lease for twenty-one years at a moderate rental. She would not sell it for she wished her son to have the place his father loved so well. The arrangement simplified the beginning of Ed's enterprise; the place being well suited for a stud farm. There was already the nucleus there of the kind of establishment Ed had in mind: the acreage was sufficient, the soil excellent, there was plenty of good water to be had from the hills, and there were numerous outbuildings and boxes. Labor was scarce but after a while Ed found some men of over fifty willing to enter his employ when he promised to house them on an acre on the estate. There were some boys of fifteen and sixteen in the neighboring villages eager to take jobs under the captain. It was slow work making a start, and Ed missed Harry Tonks who knew all about plans, materials and building.

When they were comfortably settled at Wilmslow, Evelyn asked them to make room for her and the boy and the three maids.

"A business arrangement, Ed, if Clarice agrees," she said. "No charity mind. I can afford to pay well."

Clarice was glad to have Cricket take up quarters at Wilmslow, and as there was plenty of room in the house, a suite for Evelyn was laid out. Soon Evelyn

was infected with the desire to do something practical. She saw Clarice take up dairying with great zeal. From Clungford she had brought one of her mother's best dairy maids, and already she had found a really good cowman to select a small herd of rich milkers. They found talent about the countryside going begging at sixteen and twenty shillings a week, talent in the employ of farmers incapable of using it properly.

"I think I'll try my hand at poultry," Evelyn said. "Don't laugh. I've been reading a good bit about it lately. What d' you say, Ed? There is Jenny Cuthbertson over at Crowington—a wonderful woman at that kind of thing. She'd come here if I asked her."

"Go ahead, Cricket," Ed said. "Give it a good trial. Eggs are fetching threepence halfpenny a piece."

Jenny moved over to Wilmslow and was put in charge of the poultry. All worked with a will, and though they had to meet some chaff and ill-natured remarks from acquaintances they made considerable progress. The farmers protested against the high wages paid by Ed, and the "unnecessary" up-to-date cottages he began to build for his laborers. Squires drove past Wilmslow and frowned on the "extravagance" of the "up-start" who only "chucked his father's money about" because it was made so easily. When the rumor that the Crowington estate was to be cut up for small holders got about, the squire of Westlongdale observed that "rich nobodies were the ruin of the county and they (the squires) didn't want any damned independent small holders there to upset the laborers by making them dissatisfied with their proper station."

Harold's life was made so miserable by his wife's relations and friends girding at him since Ed went to Wilmslow that he thought seriously of trying to find another parish. He wrote to his father and asked him to use his influence with the prime minister.

Lady Horton-Birkett was now quite alone in the big house. Ellen was unable to go far from the village, and her mother without companionship in the house found time drag wearily along there, though she visited Wilmslow and Ellen every day.

It was toward the end of November when Sir Alfred went down to Crowington to spend a long weekend. His wife had written him begging him to come down. She was alone. They were all gone. Even Ellen could not get down to see her.

"Alfred, I can't stay here," his wife said, when they were alone. "It is such a shocking waste at a time like this. You come only once a month now. And though I've reduced the staff it takes eight people to keep the house in order. Then there's two men in the gardens, two in the stables, a chauffeur and three boys."

"What'll you do?" he asked.

"Shut the place up and go. Nobody wants it now."

"Where'll you go?"

She paused and looked away.

"To—North Wales, I think."

"To be near your Romans, eh?"

His face was drawn, and a bitter sneer hovered round his mouth.

"What else is there for me to do? There is a large convalescent hospital there full of wounded soldiers, and not far away a place where some of the demented are to be cared for."

"Roman establishments, eh?"

"Well, they must care for their own."

"Very well. Do 's you like," he said.

"And what will you do?"

"Stay at the club. Can't get away from town for long."

"Have you thought any more of giving up——"

"Giving up—giving up. You make me sick with your giving up. How can I give up?"

She had seldom seen him out of temper. He had never snarled at her before. A look of deep pain came in her face and he saw it. In a quieter, softer tone he said: "Sorry, Evie, I'm a bit out o' sorts. The thing's got on my nerves. I'm not myself nowadays."

"Well, I wanted you to come here and let me look after you," she said, with a sad shake of her head.

"Yes, I know—I know, Evie. You're very good, but I'm a miserable coward. I haven't the courage to do what you and Ed asked. I'm in it, and in it I must stay. It's my own fault entirely. I thought I would always be—what you call it?—master of my own fate. I made a mistake. I'm just a tin can rattling at the tail of the Government's dog. I've about as much right to myself as any wretched Tommy in the trenches. It's awful. Fighting for liberty! Liberty! There's not a particle left in the land worth a two-penny cuss—beg pardon. And now the Government really is going to tax war-profits. Don't you think I would get out if I could? Isn't there every reason to get out? I don't want any more of it—I'm tired to death of it all. Besides, the very men I have always despised for their politics are now running the Gov-

ernment. What is there left worth sticking to? Nothing—absolutely nothing!”

“I’m glad you see that.”

“Besides, no one is satisfied. Everything’s mixed up, gone wrong, and in the melting pot. Now it’s got to the pot calling the kettle black. They’re all quarreling among themselves—too busy to give you a ‘thank you’ for anything you’ve done. That oratorical whipper-snapper at the War Office gave me a snub the other day because he was riding with Lady Envitoon in her car. ‘Pon my soul, I wonder the people don’t rise and hang a dozen of the folks who’ve got us into this mess. Snub me, eh?”

She watched him pace round and round the billiard table while he spoke. She knew speech at such a time was as good as blood-letting for his condition. He stopped near her and took her hands: “It’s Fred—that’s what it is, Evie, Fred! It’s hard.”

“And you never came to me.”

“I couldn’t face you.”

“This is the first time since you wrote——”

“Yes—I know. Forgive me. I’ve felt it awfully.”

He retired early after a hot bath and a dose of aconite. It was late when he woke, feeling better; the first restful night he had known for several weeks. The morning was clear, and a fine wind blew from the northeast. The meadows were still green, and some late chrysanthemums nodded in the garden. The place looked clean and orderly, and the cattle moved slowly with the wind. Away to the south he could see the square tower of Harold’s church, backed by tall beeches and banked as it seemed from his window by oaks and the red roofs of the village shops. He had

often looked upon the scene and gloried in the thought that he was master of the place. But now he felt no thrill of pride. There was something lost, some interest wrenched away that would never prompt him to revel in the sense of ownership again.

"Dead sea fruit," he muttered, and snickered at the notion. A place nobody wants! Then his mind went back nearly thirty years and he remembered having a speech to make in a neighboring constituency at a bye-election when the land question raised by Joseph Arch was dominant. He had looked up the particulars of ownership of land in the county and found according to the Derby return of the 'seventies that about thirty persons held over seventy-five per cent. of the one million acres in the shire, and that the population of it had been almost stationary then for a generation. That was in the days when he did not hesitate to parody certain lines from well-known verses: "God bless our landlord's land," and "The land is the landlord's and the fullness thereof," etc., etc. How he had changed! Well, who hadn't changed? he asked himself. He thought of the political friends of his youth. He could not remember one who had not changed.

"So you want to get away from here, eh?"

"Yes. I'll pay them all a month's wages and shut the place up."

"And what'll they do?"

"The servants?" she asked.

"Yes. They'll be all thrown out of work."

She was embarrassed and unable to reply.

"What'll the county say?"

"I didn't think of that, Alfred."

"Better let them stay where they are eating their heads off than have it said we threw them out of work when we were coining money out of the taxpayers."

"But isn't it sinful waste?" she asked. "With no one here?"

"That's it, Evie, you see. Once you start this game it's got you. Only bankruptcy or death can let you out. You want to give it up and live your own life, but it won't do. You can't. The system says, 'You be hanged. If you wish to go to North Wales, go, but don't run away with the idea that you can escape me.' So the palace we took for ourselves becomes the house of a lot of flunkys and maid-servants. Nice, isn't it?"

"Well, I can't stay here," she said firmly.

"Don't, my dear. But you can't dismiss your servants. Not now, anyway."

"Very well, then, I suppose they must stay."

"Of course they must. If the damn place were in town we might get the Government to use it for a hospital. Like Horton House."

"Have you been there since you turned it over to——?"

"No, never been near it. I forget it belongs to me."

He ordered the car with the intention of going into Minsterley to see a solicitor about an estate that had fallen into his hands. A small estate of two thousand acres in the county on which he held a mortgage of ten thousand pounds. The widow of the owner of the place had fallen on evil days and something had to be done for her. She had lost two sons in the war, and she had gone into lodgings in Minsterley. As the

car entered Crowington village he told the chauffeur to call at the vicarage. Harold was in the garden talking to an old woman, who was crying bitterly. He dismissed her when he saw his father drive up to the porch.

"Hullo, dad, did you get my letter?" Harold asked.

"Yes. What's up?"

"I hate this place, and I must get out. Get away from—right away from Crowington."

Then he told at great length all the troubles Ed had brought to him by taking Wilmslow. Harold's old friends were making things uncomfortable for him. Ed was setting such a bad example. The farmers were protesting everywhere. Then Ellen, down at Tonks', behaving in the most undignified manner, having a child—there!

"Now, there are two good vacancies, both in the hands of the prime minister. You must get me out of this place."

"And who am I to put here?"

"Oh, that's simple. The archdeacon has a nephew——"

"Has he? Well, he can keep him. There'll be no kin of the archdeacon here."

"But I've——" Harold turned pale and stuck fast for a moment.

"You've what?"

"I've nearly fixed it up."

"Then you'll unfix it at once."

"But, dad."

"I mean it." His father raised his voice angrily.

"Heavens, you'll not put me in such a hole."

"I'll have none of your friends here. If you go, I'll

find some hard-working man out of my constituency who really needs a soft job to come here——”

“But this is a plum——”

“I know it is. The kind of job a hard-working man in your church seldom gets. Now listen to me. With your emolument, and what I give you, you ought to be content. Evidently you're not. No, your parsnips have been well buttered for you.”

“Parsnips——”

“Hold your tongue. Now, take my advice and give about ten years to some poor parish in town and show you can give some service——”

“Oh, I know they've turned you against me,” Harold cried. “I knew they would. Tittle-tattling lot. Just because I went for that cowardly hound, Harry Tonks. It's Ed—Ed's done this!”

He marched up and down the library waving his hands like a madman.

“Ed never mentioned your name to me. I haven't seen or heard from Ed since his marriage. And Ellen ignores your existence. Anyway, think what you please about it. You're going out of this, and I shall put a man of my own choosing in. It's time for you to look yourself for a job that will suit you.”

His father left him. As the car drove away from the vicarage Sir Alfred gave vent to his anger in many mutterings and growlings. “The archdeacon's nephew! Never was such cheek! Confound the archdeacon! That miserable jack-in-the-box! Not likely!” Harold had done quite the wrong thing in suggesting such a change. The archdeacon who had publicly—at an election—called his father “a raving ranter turned respectable by marrying an Anglican lady.” It

was a long time ago—the first year Sir Alfred came to Crowington. But he had a long memory for that kind of insult. He did not recover his good humor before he reached Minsterley.

The solicitor was proud to meet Sir Alfred. It was good of him to spare the time during such a crisis.

"What is the position?"

"Briefly this, Sir Alfred," the solicitor began. "Mrs. Eckersley is impoverished and obliged to go into lodgings. She had three sons, one a ne'er-do-well, somewhere in South America, the others lost in the war. Now she has no near relations to help her. She managed to get along in a thirty pound villa before the war—but her sons—gone, and she is left without support. I have out of my own pocket——"

"I see. I see. What is the income from her old place?"

"Very small. About six hundred pounds I think it yields you, Sir Alfred."

"Six hundred pounds!"

"You were put to great expense fixing it up."

"Never mind. Pay her four hundred pounds."

"Four hundred pounds!"

"Yes—let her have four hundred pounds."

"But, Sir Alfred—half! Four hundred pounds! That is munificent."

"She's a lady, isn't she?"

"Such a lady, Sir Alfred! Was a Miss Laurence of Chanbury!"

"Very well, attend to it and say nothing outside. Good morning."

The solicitor bowed him down to the car and stood bare-headed—a thing of which his wife would have

utterly disapproved had she known—on the pavement until the car passed out of sight.

He could not resist the desire to go the long way home and pass Wilmslow. He wanted to call and see Ed and the others, but he did not feel strong enough for the arguments which he knew he should have to meet. As the car branched off to the west across the heath he could see the roof of the Lodge glistening in the sunlight. Suddenly the chauffeur eased the car and turned toward the window.

"There's something up over there, Sir Alfred," he said.

"Where?" his employer gasped, popping his head out of the window. The car stopped.

"See. On the hill above Clungford."

"Oh! I thought you meant Wilmslow," Sir Alfred said in a relieved tone, as he stepped from the car.

There were two men making signs. They were a long way off, but on the sky-line standing on the bare rock they could be seen distinctly. Then a man could be seen running down the fields toward Wilmslow, a mile nearer to the rocks than Clungford Hall. Sir Alfred sprang back into the car and told the chauffeur to push ahead. At the crossroads they hailed the man and asked what was the matter.

"A man—dead—on top o'—up there," he gasped breathlessly. He pointed back at Clungford Hill. "They think—he's—Mr. 'Arry—beg pardon, Sir Alfred—didn't know it war you, sir."

"Mr. Harry Tonks?"

"Yes, sir. 'Im as been missing these two weeks."

"Terrible."

"They sent me down for ropes."

"Ropes?"

"Aye, 'e's lying at bottom of 'ole like, in rocks."

Wilmslow was the only place to get ropes, near there. Sir Alfred sent the chauffeur back to the Lodge, telling him not to let the ladies know, but to get hold of the captain and bring some strong ropes, then take them to the nearest point up the road skirting the hill. Sir Alfred started off across the fields feeling sick at the sudden change in the day's events.

"There's the car, Sir Alfred," his companion cried, as he saw it turn up the hill from the crossroads. It stopped at the edge of the woods, and Ed and two men jumped out. They scrambled through the hedge and ran with the ropes toward Sir Alfred now near the foot of the hill. They climbed up the steep in silence, the tail of rope trailing behind them. When they reached the top and stood upon the rock an old man pointed down.

"'E's dead."

It was a narrow place where the body lay, and it was a difficult matter to raise it to the top. Ed shuddered when it was brought to the surface, and he spread his coat over the dead man's face.

"Take 'im to the village—?" the old forester asked.

"No, no," Ed cried. "To Wilmslow. And don't say a word that can reach Mrs. Ben."

"Aw! That's rite! Fergot about Mrs. Ben, Capt'n."

They sent for a cart, and Ed went back to the Lodge to tell his wife and Evelyn. He telephoned to the coroner—asking him to keep it as quiet as possible because of the condition of his sister.

It was a long way to take a cart, from Wilmslow, through Crowington, and up the long lane into the rutty path winding up through the woods to the clearing where Harry tried to sever the hand that might offend. The police and coroner were on the spot long before the cart arrived.

And when the body came to Wilmslow the sun was set over Clungford Hill, and a fine star shone in the deepening blue already dark enough to let the old moon's silvery crescent light the peace of the night.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE inquest held at Wilmslow passed without excitement. The verdict "accidental death" was accepted by all, but three, as satisfactory and according to the evidence. At lunch with Ed and Ben after the inquest Sir Alfred could not refrain from speaking of the disfigured hand. On top of Clungford Rock when the body had been raised the right hand lay stretched out, palm down, on a flat slab of purple slate. It was so white. The rain-washed wound caught his eye, and the gash across the knuckles seemed like a pallid mouth opening to speak. The limp white hand told a tale to Sir Alfred which he dare not believe. No one else apparently paid any attention to it. Ed had covered the face of the corpse, and straightway was busy giving directions to men about fetching a cart from Wilmslow.

Ed and Ben noticed the hand when the doctor examined the body, but he attributed all marks and scratches to the fall over the jagged rocks. There was no suggestion of murder or suicide. There was no motive for either.

"That hand," Sir Alfred remarked, "the right one. Did you notice it? It looked—a—funny to me. Like as if it had been struck by a sharp—no, not sharp—a blunt knife."

"I thought he had smashed it against a sharp piece of rock in falling—perhaps the hand was wounded that way," Ben said. "Why, what do you think? What's in your mind?"

They stared at Sir Alfred who, not expecting to be questioned, looked embarrassed. He had hoped they would make suggestions as to the cause of the wounds.

"What is it, dad?" Ed asked.

His father coughed uncomfortably, and tried to feign indifference: "Nothing—I—just thought——"

Suddenly Ed started and sat straight up.

"What?" Ben exclaimed.

"'If thy hand offend thee——'" Ed said in firm low tones.

"Good God, you don't think——?" Ben cried.

They were silent while the idea took possession of their minds. They shrunk into themselves dejectedly. After a long pause Sir Alfred said: "It struck me yesterday when they raised his body up."

"He tried to do it," Ed observed. "He said or rather hinted there was that way out. 'If thy hand offend thee,' he said. Ben! It's horrible. Harry's hand!"

Ben looked distressed. "Yes," he muttered. His voice quavered.

"Architect, wasn't he?" Sir Alfred asked.

He was sorry he had started the subject for now there came to mind the night when he went into Tonks' house to deliver the registration forms. He thought of his altercation with Harry. Were they thinking of that night?

"Well, I must get away," he said, rising briskly.

Ed saw him to the car. After he was snugly seated, he put his head out of the window: "Ed, order a very fine stone—don't say anything, you know. Send the bill to me."

They laid the body of Harry Tonks in Clungford Wesleyan churchyard. Clarice had hoped he would be buried in the grounds of the old church by the river, but Harry was not an Anglican. Still the earth was just as warm where he lay, and Ed said it did not matter much now where he rested.

They kept the news from Ellen. Ben would not let them even wear black. His little wife was having a hard time and Doctor Raymond said it would be a difficult labor. Ben was far too anxious about her to think of going back to town. The days dragged on until the noon of a fine cold day when Ellen knew the time had come for her to give to the world a child. The hours of agony lengthened into the night, and the doctor became grave. Ben shut himself up in the next room and thought he would go mad. He knew what frightful pain she must be suffering to give expression to those cries of anguish. The woman in agony to give birth. The nations in agony to give death. Strange ideas came rushing into his mind as he paced up and down the room, up and down, hour after hour, waiting, listening, hoping for the cry of relief.

It was after midnight when he stood at her bedside and looked on her little prostrate form. Lizzie at the fireside held the child. Ben leaned over his wife and laid his hand on her head. She was too weak to speak, only her eyes told him of her pain and her joy. A month passed before she began to regain her strength, and then Ben took her away to the seaside to get thoroughly well.

The house at Crowington was in the hands of the servants, and Lady Horton-Birkett was living in Wales. Wilmslow was a busy farm, and Ed was

free of the army. His father had arranged at the War Office, as he was no more use to the service, for him to leave altogether. Just as he had used his influence to get them to let the Victoria Cross matter drop, so now he urged them to give Ed his discharge. Ed did not want the pay.

Christmas was a solemn time at the Lodge. Early in the morning Sir Alfred arrived without notice. He came from town on the night train from Minsterley, and then drove out in a taxi. Ed was awake when he heard the cab pull up. He slipped on his dressing gown and went down to the dining-room where his father sat huddled up in his fur coat in a big chair.

"Dad, what brings you——" he began.

"Can't stand it, Ed."

"Been to bed yet?"

"Traveled all night."

"In the slow?—from town?"

"Yes. Better than the club."

"Lord! We better fix up a bed for you. Wait."

Ed told them to get a room ready, light a fire and see that everything was comfortable. When he returned his father was dozing. Ed looked closely at him. Great, deep, dark rings encircled his eyes, the heavy cheeks hung in chunks about his jaws, and his brow and mouth bore furrows which seemed engrained with black dust. He woke up suddenly and stammered incoherently.

"All right, dad?"

"Eh? Ed, that you?"

"You're not ill, are you?"

"No, ill, no. Oh, no. Tired, a bit—that's all."

"Nothing wrong?"

"No—no."

"Your room'll be ready in a few minutes."

"Good. I'll be all right after a snooze."

Ed saw him up to bed and left him lying on the flat of his back, his eyes closed tight. At breakfast he told Clarice and Evelyn his father had arrived and was asleep. But the sudden appearance of Sir Alfred and his strange reticence perplexed Ed, who was not a man to deal with mysteries. There was something strange in his father's manner. Late in the morning Ed stole up-stairs and peeped into the room. Still on the flat of his back his father lay, the mouth shut tight, the hands clenched on the counterpane, and the face drawn. His cheeks were wet, tear stains had coursed the furrows and disturbed the dust. Ed went softly to the bedside and stood watching the rise and fall of the clothes on his father's breast. Sir Alfred opened his eyes and looked straight at his son.

"Robert!" he muttered in a thick soppy tone.

"Bob? Well?"

"Gone."

Ed sat down on the bedside and fell into a deep moody silence. The fire in the grate was low, but the sun shone brightly, and sent shafts of yellow light through the sides of the blind into the room. He could hear Clarice outside talking to the groom, then the pawing of her horse and its capering. His wife was going for a drive over to Clungford to see her mother. Evelyn's baby jabbered at the restive animal. There was silence again when Clarice drove away.

"When did you hear?" Ed asked.

"Yesterday morning."

His father turned over and hid his face.

"Can you do with me for a day or two, Ed?"

"As long as you like. Stay where you are. You better have some food. I'll see to your bath, dad."

At lunch Ed told them his father was not well and would remain in his room for the rest of the day. It was nothing serious. No, he did not think Clarice should send for Doctor Raymond. His father was tired out. That was all. Lady Clungford came over for early dinner. There was a Christmas tree for Evelyn's child, and the table had the look of being spread for a merry feast. The servants were to have the full evening, from half past seven, to themselves. Ed kept the news of Robert's death to himself.

"Should I run up and sit with dad for a while?" Evelyn asked.

"I'd leave him alone to-day, Cricket. Don't disturb him."

His presence in the house seemed to cast a shadow over all, and in the afternoon their voices fell almost to whispers. The servants forgot to sing. And the evening feast was somewhat funereal and sad. Even Lady Clungford's jolly temper failed to rouse them.

"You're not a merry lot," she said. "Well, it isn't to be expected after all, is it? Not even for a day. Clarice, I'm thinking I was an altruist to let Ed take you away. That place over there's too big for me without you. Think of it! Just me in all that house, and a big collection of men and women to look after it. Will there be any families left after this? Have you heard from your mother, Cricket?"

"She's in Wales. Gone over to Colwyn to stay near Ellen and the baby."

"How are the dear things?"

"Little 'un's getting on well, and the baby's ripping. Ellen can't believe she's alive after it. Ten pounds, he was."

"She's nursing it?"

"Rather."

The crackers had to be pulled and the pudding set aflame. Presents were distributed and opened, and all the make-believe of festivity gone through, but it was without pleasure, without laughter.

"What are we going to do with our big places now, Ed?" Lady Clungford asked.

"Blest, if I know. Break 'em up—perhaps."

"They're no good to us. Little folks in big places with smaller incomes and crushing taxes. No men but cripples. Some boys at schools. And women—three a penny. All in a few months. Well, I never posed as a religious woman, but if I haven't thought a good bit lately of some of the old prophets. Retribution—and all that. Things haven't been right, have they, Ed?"

"Mother! You moralizing!" Clarice exclaimed.

"Well, my lass, this is the first time for nearly forty years I've had to think alone—seriously," Lady Clungford explained. "And I can't say I like the thoughts that come creeping into my mind these gloomy days. They stick, and make me feel very uncomfortable."

"What thoughts?"

"Oh, thoughts about hunting—comfort—all selfish notions——"

"You selfish," Ed cried.

"You old silly," Clarice laughed, running to her mother and giving her a big hug. "Why, you never had a selfish thought in your life!"

"Haven't I? That's all you know. Never mind about that though. Anyway, when I think of the men, all the fine young chaps of Europe—Well! it makes me feel—horrible. We're all mad—stark, staring, raving mad."

"That's so," Ed agreed. "But the worst of it is we don't know we're mad. It's a world turned upside down. I passed the county lunatic asylum the other day and I thought it was quite possible all outside were crazy and the inmates sane. The trouble is we let those who don't produce run the show—the Government, I mean. Lawyers and landowners have all the best of the game, and they produce nothing as lawyers and landowners."

"What about parsons?" Evelyn asked. "The bench of bishops?"

"Yes—add them. They produce nothing."

"And soldiers?" Lady Clungford said, with a merry twinkle.

"Right—soldiers, too," Ed replied. "Now I believe every one should be a unit in the army of production. Productive employment is what is wanted."

"Ed, I'm an old Tory—or was," Lady Clungford cried, "but I'm afraid if I stay and listen to you I'll lose my character or my principles. What a Radical you are! Me, listening to such seditious stuff. Well, I must go. God bless you. And if you're going to change things do make sure you don't make Britain any worse than it is."

"Could any one do that?" Clarice asked.

Christmas passed away leaving the houses where the slain were mourned far sadder and emptier. Sir Alfred was able to leave his room after lying abed

for two days. Again the restless mania took hold of him and he wished to be off to town at once. Ed tried to persuade him to stay at the Lodge and enjoy the country, see the farm, all the improvements and preparations for a busy spring. No, he ought to be on the spot—in town—he might be required any moment. Besides, the news did not come through the papers. He must go up to hear what was being said in the inner circles.

"I'll come down later on," he said. "Not this week—well, I might—on Saturday, say."

"What are you going to do with Crowington?" Ed asked.

"I don't know! Hang the place! If I could sell it."

"Better let me cut it up for small holdings."

"Now, the Government might take half one's income!" he cried in amazement.

"Well, what about that? You can live on half you make. There are only mother and Fred—if he is——"

"Alive? A prisoner?"

They looked at each other for a moment and then dropped their eyes.

"You must give up that money, dad. You'll not know a day's happiness till you do. I'm sure of that. You say you can't rest, can't eat, can't sleep. Life at the club is unendurable. Shall I tell you why? It is because you have lost us all now. Robert, Fred—well, they're gone. Mother! I'll not go into that. But Ellen and Cricket—they are dead against you, dad. Now, isn't it worth while thinking of us? Don't we deserve some consideration? You talk about your patriotism and your duty to the Government, but what about your patriotism and your duty to us? You

must recognize we have our lives to live. We are young—we have to choose our own way of expressing ourselves. We don't agree with you. And we don't think you're doing right in giving yourself body and soul to this old man's war. Besides, it's rotten for us to think you haven't the strength of mind to flaunt public opinion and do what you know is just."

He sat and listened to Ed as quietly as a child who knows it is in disgrace. It was pitiable.

"You're right—quite right," he mumbled. "I agree, Ed. But——"

"But what?"

"I can't get out. You must all think what you choose. I'm sorry, but—well, there it is."

As Ed saw him drive away in the car, he thought his father personified the Government. He knew what was right, but he could not do it. The system was false, rotten, through and through, but it must be carried on. He knew war was horrible, but shells must be made and thousands of the best of Britain's men must be hustled away to the shambles. But he had not this time referred to Christianity and western civilization. That was all to the good. Cant was forgotten in his extremity. His religious associations were broken off, or rather they broke off. A year's desuetude attacked them at the core and found them rotten.

Ellen saw her mother every day. Ben came down for long week-ends to Colwyn. It was strange to see Lady Horton-Birkett in deep mourning, spending her days in visiting hospitals and asylums. She came twice a day to see Ellen, but she stayed only for a few minutes.

"I'm spending all the money I can on these places," she said, after telling Ellen of the work of the establishments.

"I didn't think you had the nerve for that kind of work," Ellen remarked.

"I didn't, but since Fred—and now Robert is dead, I feel I must be there at the hospitals all the time. I've done so little of real service in my life, and now I've begun—so late—to try what I can do—I feel I must crowd as much into a day as possible. You see you all are grown up, and you don't need me now—and dad is—up in town. He seems to get on without us."

"Funny, how we've broken up, isn't it?" Ellen observed. "Like *Deacon Jones' One Horse Shay*. But without it's perfect construction. I wonder what will happen when the men come back again. Ben says revolution. Well, revolution is going on now. The whole thing is ready to go to pieces. Ben says the baby has the future—we're done for. Too old for the great change that will come and not young enough to take part in the fight. It will take a generation at least to clear away the debris of the old systems. Dad is the type—better, in many ways, than the type. Impervious to Radical change. Liberal in name and Tory in spirit. A good-natured sham—one that not only deceives you, but one that deceives itself. It learns nothing. 'All's well with me—don't unsettle things.' That's it. Religion is its hobby, and trade is its religion; politics the road to social advancement, and party the god of honors. A system without soul, devoid of art. Mere dross!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE Munitions Act was the cause of all the trouble. Sir Alfred had been warned by his managers of the growing discontent of his employees. At the board meeting held to consider the threatened strike of all the men at the big works in Strathclyde, he tried to shift his responsibility by saying the workers were for all intents and purposes in the employ of the Government, that since the Act came into force they, as a firm, held no direct control over the men. "We are victims of the system," he said.

Sir Redvers Foote interjected: "The profits are ours!"

"True—what is left after taxation," Sir Alfred said.

Old Sir Redvers was a stickler for accuracy, even when his pocket was touched, and though he suffered no qualms about how wars were fought, he did not like to be associated with a firm that took extreme advantage of employees under one-sided agreements. He said:

"The fact of the matter is—and to put it bluntly, my lords and gentlemen, I think it's a damn shame—we're not carrying out our promises to the men. I knew this Munitions Act would get us into trouble, I told you so. Confound it, I hate tyranny. And I'll see the Government far enough before they'll make me responsible for their persistent blundering. These men must be released at once and the Act amended fairly or I'll resign."

Three of the men had been imprisoned for refusing to work, and in protest all their Strathclyde employees threatened to "down tools" if they were not set at liberty within three days. The position was critical. So much so indeed that the board had asked their Strathclyde manager to come to town with the men's delegates and lay their case before the directors. Both Ben and Ellen had written to Sir Alfred urging him to act in the interests of the men before there was a great strike. It was at Ben's instigation the special board meeting was called. He was closely in touch with the unions and knew just how the matter stood.

"I should like to know where we stand," Lord Cintoul said. "I am informed the Government are running up acres of gigantic State factories all over the place. The site for one of 'em, I am told, covers thirty-two square miles, and has upon it, circling round all the sheds, no less than forty miles of railway track. Now, that is a very serious matter for us to consider. And I should like to know if we are to be left high and dry when these State factories are ready to turn out shells and—a—things."

It was a serious business, and the directors looked anxiously at Sir Alfred for a reply.

"The demand is unlimited, and I am assured no action of Government in this respect need cause us the slightest concern," he said. "Now should we have these men in and hear what they have to say for themselves?"

It was agreed. And the delegates were ushered into the room. It was arranged that one delegate should state the grievances of the men; another, the defects

in the Munitions of War Act; and a third, the amendments which would satisfy the workers.

Mr. Ferguson said the working of the Act had put the men's backs up, without a doubt. They were sore—very. In all about one million were affected, and a big proportion of the men embittered and angry.

"The situation is really bad. For the papers don't report these cases. It's like a totally new criminal law they have to face. A law that's administered harshly and solely in the interests of the capitalists—employers, I mean."

"That is their view, Mr. Ferguson," Sir Alfred remarked.

"It's their view I'm stating, Sir Alfred. And I think their view is about right. For every day in the week, on an average between sixty and seventy cases are heard in the new Munitions Courts. You must understand the chairman of the court has all the power of a tribunal. He gives its decision and pronounces sentence, against which there is no appeal."

"Think of that," Sir Redvers exclaimed.

Mr. Ferguson finding he had a sympathizer turned at once to Sir Redvers: "Aye, think o' it. And the two lay 'assessors'—one supposed to protect the workman and the other to protect the employer—being unable to take any effective shares in the proceedings."

"Monstrously unfair——"

Sir Alfred cut Sir Redvers short by tapping the table: "Will you address me, Mr. Ferguson?"

"Your pardon, Sir Alfred. Well, as I was going to say, it's strange how seldom an employer is fined and how often a workman has to pay up. That's what makes the men believe the Act is drawn wholly in the

interests of the masters. The men have had to pay thousands of pounds in fines."

"Thousands, Mr. Ferguson?" Sir Alfred cried incredulously.

"Aye, thousands, Sir Alfred. That's why you have wide-spread discontent. The three men who are now in prison in default of fines mean to stay there in protest against the Act. I'll not go into the matter of offense. But the Government did promise to hold an official inquiry. They didn't do it. Another promise broken, the men say. Now the men, nearly one hundred thousand, through their delegates have sent an ultimatum to the Government to release the imprisoned men within three days or there'll be a general stoppage of work in the district. That's all I have got to say, Sir Alfred."

Mr. Ferguson backed away from the table and made room for his colleague, Mr. Rogers.

"You speak on the defects of the Act, Mr. Rogers?" Sir Alfred asked.

"Yes, that is what I am here for, Sir Alfred. In the first place let me say there was no need for the Act. The old law which gave an employer the power to summon in the County Court a workman for absenting himself from work, unpunctuality, being drunk on duty, and so on, was quite sufficient. The men understand that. Their complaint is the Munitions Act is solely a weapon forged by the Government to kill trade unions. The Act takes from the workman his right to leave a situation where he feels that he is not properly treated. It is a penal offense for the worker to leave his employer's service without the employer's consent—even at the expiration of his

contract and with due notice. Then it is a penal offense for the men in any workshop to refuse to undertake a new job, however low may be the wage or piece-work price that the foreman offers. The men say these restrictions are a reversion to the Statute of Laborers of the Middle Ages."

"Keep to the question, Mr. Rogers. We can dispense with history," Sir Alfred rapped out.

"That's true, Sir Alfred. When I was interrupted I was going to add the Munitions Court usually refuses to listen to the workman's plea that the rate of wages that he was offered was not the proper rate, or was not according to either the contract or the undertaking of the Munitions Department. The court won't discuss wages or hours of labor or conditions of employment. The jurisdiction of the court extends only to enforcing the employer's will. The court has held it to be an offense for any workman, after he has worked the full contract day, to refuse to work overtime, including night work and Sundays, whether or not anything extra is paid for such overtime."

"Impossible," Sir Alfred cried.

"Mr. Rogers, please," Lord Cintoul exclaimed.

"Can't believe that," Sir Redvers gasped.

"It's perfectly true—perfectly," Mr. Rogers said, with an emphatic tap on the table. "Besides, a workman may not, even after due notice, change his employment—not even from one munition factory to another—in order to get higher wages—however low may be the wages he is getting."

The board looked in amazement at the delegate and then shifted uncomfortably about on their chairs. They were the employers, but Sir Alfred was the only

member of the board who had put his nose into a factory since the war began.

Mr. Rogers paused while his eyes slowly looked the directors over: "Under the Act the employers can make rules and change them without the workmen's consent. And he can enforce any arbitrary rule by fine. The other week one of your men was fined twenty pounds, the loss of four weeks, yet he was not allowed to leave the employment. It has been held in many cases that although a workman may not, without his employer's consent, go off to another situation, the employer is not bound to give him work or wages. The men call it the Ball and Chain Act. Numbers of cases occur in which workmen are told to 'stand by' because materials are not ready, or because there are, for the moment, no more jobs. Hours are lost, sometimes whole days, weeks indeed, earning nothing when the men know other firms want their services and would pay high wages. But the employer will not give the men their discharge certificate without which no other employer dare engage them."

Mr. Hume told the board how the Act should be amended. Then the delegates left the room.

Left to themselves the directors passed away an hour in heated discussion. Sir Alfred was blamed for the whole trouble. Though he strove to make the board understand he was not the Government, that he told them he disliked the Act from the first, they were not appeased and reminded him that they relied wholly on his judgment and business experience to keep the firm free of criticism.

The board rose without reaching a decision. But two days later they heard that the imprisoned men

had been released, their fines paid by some person or persons unknown to the men.

Sir Alfred went out after nightfall very seldom now. He dined at the club, and loafed about the smoke room smoking, and the reading-room dozing. News from the front interested him so little now he scarcely ever stopped in the spacious hall to read the telegrams. Sometimes he chatted with old acquaintances, but not for long; even conversation was a bore.

One night, however, he met his old friend Lord Parkgate who was in town to meet a wounded nephew expected home from Servia.

"Oh, it's you, Birkett, eh?"

"Yes. Sorry to hear of your losses," Sir Alfred said.

"Awful, isn't it? You, too, eh? You've caught it. Very sorry—very. Well, when's it going to end—or is it the end of the world? What d'I tell you, eh?"

Sir Alfred thought of the day he spoke to Parkgate on the terrace of the House. It seemed ages ago—so long ago it seemed he had to look down a long narrowing vista of months which lengthened like years to fix his mind on that day before the war when his old friend told him his fears.

"And all we toiled for gone, Birkett. Like wastrels we think of the day we came into our inheritance. But we've got to go through with it. You, who got us into it, must get us out of it."

Sir Alfred was too weary to protest against the suggestion that he got any one into it. He lay back in his chair and surrendered himself up to the scolding of the old peer. Parkgate was one of the small school of Radical aristocrats that fostered the movements of

peace, cooperation and financial reform in Gladstone's palmy time. But he had not changed. He stood firmly all through the war for the ideas of his early days.

"Plenty of shells, now?" Parkgate asked, without a sneer.

"Yes."

"Men working—sticking at it?"

"Y-e-s—most of them."

"They'll have it in for us when this is over. You look out for squalls. Glad I'm not in the shell business, Birkett. Wish you were out of it—'pon my soul I do."

"Why?"

"Men will give you all a lot to think about some day—you see!"

"Perhaps you're right," Sir Alfred muttered, raising himself up and looking at Parkgate.

"Oh, you feel it, too—do you?"

"We're having an awful time. It's that abominable Munitions Act."

"Abominable! My dear Birkett, it is not nice—not nice. Talk about Russia! Dear, dear, dear. And to think old Radicals like you and me letting that go on. We'll catch it some day. Maybe I'll be dead and buried before they start on me. But you're younger—and besides you've been benefited by it."

Again the wish to get out and be free of all the trouble rose in his mind. If he could only do what Ed wished him to do. Besides, there were the masses, and they had a way of surging over after a war and punishing at the polls the party that conducted the war. He thought of the Boer War and Sir Henry

Campbell-Bannerman. He was traduced and reviled—called a pro-Boer, but the masses within three short years made him prime minister.

"Did you see what the *Times* said about it?" his lordship asked.

"Yes, I read it."

"Made me feel deuced shaky, Birkett. It did really. The land of the free, eh? Well, damn Prussia, if she hasn't fixed her devilish methods on our lot. And to think of our lads giving their lives up for this—this!"

"Can't be helped. But then it's only for the duration of the war."

"That's what they tell us. But I'm afraid there'll be more need for it after the war. Between ourselves."

Sir Fergus Paulton came into the room and stood by the door looking to see if he knew any one there. Suddenly he saw Sir Alfred and went over to him.

"My dear Alfred—how are you?" Paulton cried. "Oh, Lord Parkgate! I am glad to see you. Better news to-night. Italy's sending men to Greece, and Russia's going to teach the Bulgarians a lesson. It will be all over in the spring. You got my letter, Alfred?"

"Thanks, Fergus, yes. It was kind of you. A sad loss."

"Very. Evie, quite well?"

"Yes—she's away—in North Wales."

"North Wales," Paulton cried in surprise. "I remember. My niece said she saw her. Is it near Holywell she is staying?"

"Yes—somewhere near. My daughter Ellen is down there."

Sir Alfred felt uncomfortable. Somehow he

dreaded every coming word of Paulton's. Could he turn the subject? What would he say next?

"Is she? Really! Well, you'll laugh, but we've had a funny argument about your wife."

It was no use. Paulton was off on a story and, as Sir Alfred knew, there was no polite way of stopping him once he began. Paulton swung his glasses round and round his finger which he held stretched out, cocked his head up, closed his eyes and chuckled to himself. He was vastly amused about something.

"My niece—Mrs. Woods—you know. She has been staying in Wales for a month. Nerves—had to keep quiet. Well, one day she saw a lady go into a Catholic church—a lady she thought she knew. Then another day she saw the same lady come out of—the same Catholic church. She had a good look at her and said to herself that is Lady Horton-Birkett. She told my nephew when he got down for the week-end. He didn't believe it—pooh-poohed the notion—said it was preposterous and chaffed his wife, said she must have been mistaken."

He slapped Sir Alfred on the knee and laughed.

"Alfred, my dear fellow, think of it! Your wife going to a Catholic church. Well, one Sunday when my nephew was down there the same lady came in a motor. My niece and nephew began to chaff each other again. So Woods ran out and asked the chauffeur whose motor he was driving. And what do you think he said?"

"I don't know."

"Lady Horton-Birkett's. Fancy! Well, when they told me I roared. Alfred's wife going to a Catholic church!"

Paulton stopped laughing suddenly and looked at the faces of his friends. There was a long awkward pause.

"Well," Parkgate exclaimed. "What is there funny about that?"

"Don't you think it's funny, Alfred?" Paulton inquired in a subdued tone.

"No, I don't, Fergus," he said, rising and looking at his watch. "My wife is a Catholic. Now I think I'll trot off to bed. I'm not feeling very well. Good night."

His lordship and Paulton watched him leave the room.

"Good gracious," Sir Fergus gasped. "A Catholic?"

"Wasn't she a Willis?" Parkgate asked.

"Yes—y-e-s—all Church—all!"

"Um! thought so. Strange!"

"What a blow!"

"Is it?"

"I should say so."

"Well, I'd rather be in her shoes than his. Good night, Paulton."

"Eh? Oh! Yes! Good night."

"So it is known," he thought, when he reached his room. Paulton was a chatterbox, and Parkgate was no oyster. But could such secrets be kept? It was sure to leak out some day. And the world would take it at first in just the same way as Paulton did. Preposterous, it would seem. Then when it had to believe it, the world would be just as shocked. But why should the world be shocked? What world? The same one that was shocked at German Kultur? His thought ran on in a haze of contradiction. Clear thinking was not his specialty. Yet he felt somehow that the dreaded thing called "world" opposition was

a flimsy boggy that downright good sense could put to flight if only one had the will to do it. Was everybody half right and half wrong? Was there good in everything and every one but the "world" was too obtuse to find it? What was he worrying himself about? His wife was a Catholic. The religion of one of the Allies. Well, he was a non-conformist, and she was an Anglican when he married her. Suppose the war were to drive him to atheism or to agnosticism. Ideas change. War was changing Britain fast. Who ever dreamed a Liberal minister would practically reenact and reaffirm the Statute of Laborers. What a muddle and a mess!

He lay for hours tossing about, then changing his pillow, shaking up the bolster, lying on this side, then on that, sometimes counting a hundred, counting again, shutting his mind to all thoughts and wondering if he were really not thinking of anything. It was gray dawn when he fell asleep, after angrily damning the twittering sparrows on his window-sill. He dreamed that he was the Government and his family the nation. They were gathered around him—moody, sullen, divided. He had addressed them in flowing periods, telling them how he had spent his life building up a great empire—business. He showed how his firm carried its interests nearly all over the world. His trade was colossal. There was nothing like it on the earth. Then his family through the spokesman said: "That is all very true. But we don't want it. You have spent your energy and your money in vain. The price you ask us to pay for it all is far, far more than it is worth to us."

CHAPTER XXV

DAYTIME fires do not light up the heavens, but the wind blew from east northeast and great volumes of smoke were wafted over Clungford Hill. Evelyn was at the nursery window playing with the child when she noticed the black cloud of swirling smoke in the east. Lady Clungford was in her grounds talking to her gardener when he drew her attention to the heavy cloud above the hill.

"Some ricks afire, my lady," he said.

"Isn't hay dear enough?" she muttered.

Crowington village was out and in a state of turbulent alarm. The Manor was in a blaze before the fire brigade could be got together. It was a primitive institution and the members were scattered, most of them away from home, for it was Minsterley market day. Ebenezer Tonks was not there to give orders and Mrs. James, the custodian of the key of the shed where the pump engine was housed, was not at home. Babbicombe took the law into his own hands and broke open the door of her cottage. A dozen willing hands ransacked her room for the key without finding it. Then Babbicombe resorted to strong measures and forced open the door of the shed. When the engine started for the manor the great house of the Horton-Birketts was a roaring furnace. No one thought of sending to Wilmslow, all were engrossed in the fire.

"How'd it start?" Babbicombe shouted to a servant ringing her hands in the drive.

"Fat! Cook upset a pan o' fat on the kitchen fire," she cried. "What'll 'er ladyship say. Oh, dear me!"

The primitive implements of the Crowington fire brigade were almost useless. They pumped in vain. Their efforts made little or no impression on the fire. The old timbers and plaster burned like tinder, and the roof soon crashed in with a terrible roar. Sparks flew far away, glistening on the wind for a while then leaving the air full of charred sticks and smuts.

"An' only the servants at 'ome to look after it," old Billy Egerton mumbled, as he peered through his half-closed lids at the crumbling house. "It do be a shame—truly it do. Only ould men at 'ome, too, as can do nothin'—the young gone when they'd bin most use."

The fire had been burning an hour when Ed learned the news. One of his men ran in and told him the postman in passing had shouted out, "Crowington Manor's afire."

Ed drove the chestnut all the way up the hill road at a gallop, but when he turned down the long brow which led to the village he eased the horse. He could see haste was unnecessary. A long trail of folk was winding up the lower road going back to Crowington village. The house was a roofless ruin. When he drove up to the front Babbicombe told him the story. Save for the odd pieces of furniture, a few pictures and marbles and rugs, strewn about the lawn, the contents of the house were destroyed.

He told the servants to find lodgings in the village, then he drove to the post-office and telegraphed to his father.

"Manor burned down noon to-day little saved, what instructions? Ed."

Going back to Wilmslow he met his wife and Evelyn. He told them there was nothing to be done. The butler would have the few pictures, marbles and rugs removed to a place of safety and store the odds and ends of furniture in the outbuildings. Clarice and Evelyn were curious and wished to see the ruin, so they drove on.

Harold was there when they reached the lawn, and many county people had driven over. Clarice nodded to this one and that one. Evelyn saw nothing but the shell of the house. Babbicombe had decided to let it burn out.

Ed did not hear from his father until next morning. The telegram was brief:

"Have notified insurance company. Dad."

Sir Alfred had read of the fire in the last edition of the *St. Stephen's Gazette* at the House before he saw Ed's telegram which had been sent to the club. The paragraph said the Manor was destroyed and then followed a short history of the building.

"So that's gone, too," Sir Alfred muttered.

Ed's letter told him the details: how the fire started, how long the house took to burn and what was left. His father wrote back saying the servants would be paid a month's wages and the cost of their belongings lost in the fire, but they must try to find employment elsewhere.

A few days later Sir Alfred left town for Wilmslow. When the train left Euston it was crowded and in his compartment there were two wounded officers;

one from a hospital in France going to his home near Preston. He was Major Colne. The lower part of his face was hidden by a bandage, and his right leg from the knee down was missing. The other man was Lieutenant Commander Stearns, the son of a naturalized Austrian, Ludwig Strauss, the banker who changed his name at the outbreak of the war. Sir Alfred knew his father. The soldiers recognized their traveling companion by the name on his despatch box on the rack. Stearns had lost an arm, and his right knee was badly smashed. He had lain at Cairo for two months while the doctors battled to save his leg from amputation. Now he was on his way to Cumberland to his father's house near Penrith. There were over forty wounded men on the train. Some were attended; most of them were able to look after themselves. But all hobbled more or less with difficulty. The railway servants from inspectors to porters acted more like well-drilled hospital attendants than ticket and luggage men. And there were physically whole soldiers going back to their regiments soon to be sent to the front, and they assisted their wounded comrades in every way. It was a strange scene. The pity of it! The misery, the kindness, the bravery and the peculiar cheeriness of all the soldiers struck Sir Alfred as incongruous and unnatural. He watched them get into the carriages while a sinking feeling in the stomach sent cold chills creeping over him.

Stearns introduced himself after the train started. The young British naval officer of Austrian blood was singularly patriotic. As a rule soldiers say very little when traveling with civilians. Sir Alfred had

noticed that in his journeys back and forth to town. Stearns was voluble and particularly vindictive. He was bitter and revengeful, though he had never been in Germany or Austria. He was born in Britain, educated at a well-known school, and served three years in an engineering yard on the Clyde. Sir Alfred thought it was nauseating to hear him say: "These German and Austrian devils must be wiped off the face of the earth!" Sir Alfred had never heard a full-blooded English soldier say that much, and he wondered if he were a naturalized Austrian if he could in similar circumstances speak that way of the French and British.

"How old are you?" he asked Stearns.

"Nearly twenty-four."

Colne had paid little attention to the conversation. He was reading a little book. Sir Alfred noticed him every now and then and wondered what his face must look like without the bandage. The monocle affected by Colne seemed peculiar; it gave him a grotesque appearance. There was besides a great raw-looking scar on his wrist which attracted Sir Alfred's attention every time Colne turned a page of his book.

"You've been at the Dardanelles, Lieutenant-Commander?"

"Sulva Bay, Sir Alfred. Perfectly devilish."

"And the Turks, how do you feel about them?"

"Oh, they're—they're not bad chaps. Awfully misguided. Good soldiers—great fighters. It's those damn Germans. All their fault."

"Sulva Bay was a shocking affair?"

"Mad. Just mad."

Stearns tried to fire a pipe.

"Let me help you," Sir Alfred said.

"No, thanks. Must learn to do it myself now. I'll have lots of time. I've done my bit—or I should say I've given my bits. They say I'll never be able to bend this knee. No riding, no golf, no shooting. Eh, oh! They do knock you about these days. Twenty-four and nothing to do. Why they didn't finish me altogether I don't know. Their guns and shells, God knows, are things to finish any one with. Ever seen any of their shells, Sir Alfred? I've got some specimens in that bag."

He rose and hauled a biggish bag down from the rack. He opened it—rather proud of the feat for a one-armed man—and took out some specimens. He gave them to Sir Alfred.

"What's the matter?" Stearns asked. "Don't like the look of 'em, eh? Ugly things, aren't they?"

He did not know that Sir Alfred was a director of the German firm that made one of the shells. He did not know that Sir Alfred started not because he did not like the look of "the ugly things," but because he noticed the trade-mark of his firm on the metal.

Colne watched the scene; the monocle gave him a grotesque appearance. Stearns took the specimens from Sir Alfred and replaced them in his bag.

"I wonder you keep those things," Sir Alfred said, wiping his hands together. "Don't you, too?" he asked Colne, turning to him with a look of disgust. For a few moments their eyes rested on Colne, who stared at them while something like a smile crept over the visible half of his face. From his pocket he took a

pad and pencil, and wrote in a large flourishing hand:

"Can't speak. Tongue injured. Same kind of shells shattering us in France."

He passed the pad to his companions. They could not hide their shocked expressions.

"Very sorry," Sir Alfred muttered.

"Beastly hard luck," Stearns said.

Colne took the pad and wrote:

"Lost leg. Only out three days this time when it happened. Been in hospital three months. Shall get tin jaw when wound thoroughly healed. Is your son at Crowington?"

Sir Alfred read the writing.

"Ed is at Wilmslow," he replied. "He is married."

"Miss Clungford?" Colne wrote.

"Yes. You know them then?"

"Yes. Want to meet them some day. Shall be staying near Minsterley. Wonder if they would see me?"

"Certainly—certainly—a—" wanting the name.

"Major Colne," he wrote.

The name conveyed nothing to Sir Alfred.

"Bore you writing?" he put down.

"No—no, indeed."

"Thanks. Tell your son you saw me. Say I want to speak—funny!—to him, please. Will be at Bridgeton House with the Padgetts."

"I shall let him know at once."

Stearns went on to the north, but Sir Alfred and Colne had to change at Stafford. At Minsterley they parted. The Padgetts were there to meet the major; Sir Alfred went on to Crowington in the local. In

that short journey the train passed through a fertile country of tens of thousands of acres. In the twilight lamps in the cottage and farm windows shone. How many times had he counted the dwellings on both sides of the railway line in all the thirty years since he took Crowington? And how often had he looked for a new building? Four in that distance were all he could find. Four new dwellings. He used to count the men and women in the fields—just to pass the time while the train puffed along. How many were gone? The empty beautiful country. And now there was one house less, and that a big one, his own.

The car was at the station.

"To Wilmslow, Sir Alfred?" Barnes asked.

After a moment's reflection he replied, "Go down to Crowington first. I want to have a look at the place."

The lodge-keeper was startled when he heard the familiar tooting for the gate to be opened. He hastened out in his shirt-sleeves and tipped his bare-head as the car passed up the drive. Sir Alfred got out and walked up and down the front surveying the ruin.

"Should I turn the car and put the light on it?" the chauffeur asked.

"No, no, Barnes, don't," he said sharply.

Great charred beams obstructed the entrance, and in the fading light the interior seemed like a crazy trellis formidable to any intruder.

"Awful, Barnes, awful," he said, turning to the car.

"Yes, Sir Alfred. Defective flue, they say."

How warm and cheery Wilmslow looked when Ed

helped him off with his coat. There was a fragrance he had never known at Crowington. Evelyn's child was jabbering boisterously in a distant part of the house, and the Inverness terriers were gamboling and barking on the staircase. The dining-room door was open; a log fire threw bright flashes across the dimly lighted table spread for dinner.

"Ellen's here," Ed said. "Came this morning from Wales."

"How is she?"

"Getting fit. She says mother is all right."

"That's a blessing. How are you doing here?"

"Fairly well. Things are straightening out now."

They went to Ed's den. On the desk some books lay open. Sir Alfred glanced at them and looked amused.

"Bookkeeping, eh?"

"Yes—very interesting work. I like it, but it's one-sided just now. All pay."

Sir Alfred told how he kept a set of books from his sixteenth year until the business became so big he had to hand it over to the bookkeeper of the firm. That was his private account.

"You've mastered writing with your left hand?"

"Yes, but I'm a bit slow at it yet," Ed replied.

"By the bye, I came down with a Major Colne—knows you. He wants to see you and Clarice."

"Oh!"

"He's staying with the Padgetts outside Minsterley. He's in a terrible mess."

"Mess?"

"Lost a leg, and half his jaw gone."

"Poor fellow."

"Can't speak. He has to write on a pad. His tongue is injured. Sad sight."

Ed thought of the day Clarice drove him over to Crowington. He kept his thought to himself.

"I'll take you over to see the ruin in the morning," Ed said, by way of changing the subject.

"I've seen it. Called there as I came up."

"What will you do—rebuild it?"

"Rebuild? Never! Oh, no. Clear it all away! I'm not sorry it's gone, Ed."

"Didn't know you felt that way about it."

"Well, I do. I made up my mind when your mother left it I would never stay there again," Sir Alfred replied.

"And the land?"

"I don't know. Land is certainly the only safe thing to hold now. It's no use spending any money on it. The taxes will be fearfully heavy on all improvements after this. We must stick to something. Funny, isn't it? There'll be little incentive to improve anything when the war's over. You see what the local taxes will cost you when you've done building here. Let the land lie as it is—it will be cheaper in the end."

"That is because you don't need the income from it," Ed said. "It's a rotten system, dad, to permit wealthy men like you to hold thousands and thousands of acres just for a hobby. And at a time like this—well, I think the Government's mad to let you do it. They thump the taxes down on your income knowing you'll sooner or later shift them in the rise of prices. What do you care for a fifty per cent. tax on

your income? How many times bigger is your income than it was two years ago?"

"I shall be one of the richest men in England after this," Sir Alfred said in a low tone. "I'll retire the day it's over."

Ed sighed wearily and led the way to the dining-room. Clarice greeted him warmly, but Ellen and Evelyn merely said: "Well, dad?" They addressed no remarks to him during the meal; Clarice and Ed engaged him in conversation. Later in the evening when he and Ed were alone, he said: "They mean to keep it up?"

"Keep what up, dad?"

"Their bad manners—taking no notice of me," he said in a surly tone.

"They won't take much notice of you," Ed said firmly and slowly.

"I am their father—they might—"

"Don't let's start that again. That you're their father doesn't matter a brass farthing. You know what they want you to do."

"You'll drive me away altogether."

"I shan't. I mean to stick to you until you see daylight through this business. They say I'm wasting time bothering with you. I don't—somehow. I have a feeling you will do the right thing yet."

"Give up the money?" his father exclaimed.

"Yes."

"All earned in a legitimate business?"

"All earned out of the taxpayers."

"I'd like to see you folks take that attitude if you weren't otherwise provided for," Sir Alfred muttered in a low growl.

"I know you've been thinking that," Ed said. "You're quite wrong. We're sorry we have anything to fall back on, for we might convince you—if we had nothing at all. Anyway, I shall never spend more than I earn. It will be only a hard working farmer's living at best. I don't want any more."

"D'you mean to say you won't touch any of the money when I'm gone?"

"I mean I shall never at any time take a penny from you, dad."

"Then it will go to Harold."

"And Fred—"

"If he's alive."

"Then Harold will have it?"

"I'll pour it down a sewer first," Sir Alfred cried, and brought his hand down on the table with a thump.

"Harold!" he exclaimed with a sneer. "A thousand a year, that's all he'll get. And out of the parish of Crowington he goes. A vicar! Harold, a vicar?"

"Why, what's he done, dad?"

"All that high church nonsense he practised. That was what set your mother off. He was responsible for starting her on the road to Rome."

"I don't know anything about that."

"I do."

"Well, don't get angry. Mother's very happy and busy now. She's doing a lot of good, Ellen says."

"Thank heaven one of us is happy."

It was late when Sir Alfred woke. The lovely balmy morning lay like an iridescent filmy veil over the tranquil meads. A spring day out of place. He raised his bedroom window and looked across the heath to the woods on Clungford Hill. The sun was

warm. As he stood at the window he caught the sound of Ellen's voice. She was playing with her baby. He listened, trying to catch what she was saying. A surge of love for her rose in his heart, and he for a moment could scarcely resist the temptation to find her. He was sure she was at the window of the next room. Then the words came distinctly to him:

"Baby, boy. Remember what mother says, you must never take any of granddad's money."

CHAPTER XXVI

COLNE wrote to Ed asking him to call and see him at the Padgetts'. He was not to make a special journey into Minsterley, but to run over to Bridgeton House if he were in the town on some other errand. Clarice was embarrassed when she read the letter. She turned it over and over again while her mind flooded with the memories of Colne's visit to Clungford. Her eyes were anxious when she looked at her husband.

"Will you, Ed?" she asked.

He thought her voice trembled a little.

"Why not?"

"It makes me feel miserable to think—to think of him—of that time," she faltered.

"You needn't. The poor chap's badly knocked about, Clarice. Dad told me he traveled from Euston with him."

"Well, if you wish."

"I must go into Minsterley in a day or two. Suppose we go in together?"

"Very well."

"You don't mind, old girl?"

"If you don't—no."

The quiet confidence of her husband gave her courage. He was so sure of himself; sure of doing the right thing, of rejecting all ill-feeling. Colne wanted to see him. That was enough.

The room into which they were shown at Bridge-

ton House was large and dark in oak and dull red hangings. The five windows looking toward Wales had their blinds half drawn. It was a gray day of heavy rolling banks of pearl and slate cloud coloring. A nurse wheeled Colne into the room in an invalid's chair. The low lights fell on him as he moved near Clarice, his long hand outstretched to greet her. She was hurt—painfully shocked to see him. The black covering to the bandage gave him a gruesome look. It passed over one eye, down the side of his nose and over half his mouth. The visible half of his thin face was sallow; the skin was drawn tight over his high cheek-bone. His monocle glinted strangely, and in the dull half light, obscured his eye. The right half of his mouth curled into something like a smile, and little restless wrinkles spread up his nostrils to his brow.

There was an awkward pause after he shook hands with his visitors. The nurse placed the chair at the table and laid a pad and pencil before Colne.

"Only fifteen minutes, please," the nurse said, as she withdrew from the room.

Colne wrote: "It's good of you to come. Thanks." He passed the pad to them. It was most uncomfortable watching the eye behind the monocle searching for understanding and sympathy in their faces.

Clarice was deeply agitated and blurted out:

"And Billy. Have you seen Billy lately?"

Colne started, dropped the monocle—it jingled on his coat buttons—then he opened his mouth slowly. His eye traveled sharply from Clarice to Ed. There was a strange light in it as he replaced the monocle

and took up the pencil. They sat in perplexing silence while he wrote:

"Wanted to see you about Jawton. Have heard the true story of what happened that day. First order was countermanded and the second order was not given to the reserve. Mist upset the original plan. Jawton did not know the first order was off, so he could not have known anything about the second. It has been discovered he was at breakfast and was not informed. Whole story came out just after Jawton died."

He gave them the pad, and while they read he twisted the pencil nervously in and out of his fingers.

"Poor Jawton," Ed sighed.

Then Colne wrote:

"That is the kind of thing that is doing for us. No one to blame. The fellows are getting a bit sick of all the blundering. Everybody is now dreadfully sorry about you."

Ed read it and said: "I don't think any more about it."

"I admire you," Colne wrote. "You have acted splendidly all through it. When I got out—shortly after I saw you—I was sent up at once and smashed the third day. Never thought I would pull through it. Wouldn't mind if I had my leg. But very awkward losing my speech. I want to tell you how badly I feel about you. No more gossip for me. Glad you are married. That makes it easier."

He passed the pad to them and watched their faces while they read his words.

"Don't think any more about it," Ed said. "The

nurse who attended Jawton before he died wrote and told me all about it."

"Jawton told her the story?" Colne wrote.

"Yes. And she sent it to me," Ed replied.

"Good! I knew old 'Brimstone' would turn up trumps after all. He wasn't a bad sort when you really knew him well. Glad to know he did the right thing."

The nurse came into the room and gave them the signal the interview was at an end. Colne pressed Clarice's hand in his own bony, yellow-looking claws.

"Let me know if I can do anything—anything," Ed said, giving his left hand.

They were going to the front door when the nurse came to Ed and drew him back into the room. Colne was writing. Ed stood by waiting for him to look up. The nurse held the door. When Colne passed the pad to Ed, he had written:

"Thought you knew. Billy dead. Killed just before I left France. Didn't want to tell you while your wife was here."

Within a few days Ed heard from the War Office that Lord Clungford was dead. His relatives had been notified at the address left by the deceased, one where Billy stayed when he was in London four years ago. Lady Clungford and Clarice took the news bravely.

"Better dead, mother, than to live like Major Colne," Clarice said.

"What will be done with all the terrible cripples?" her mother asked. "'Pon my word if I don't think the slain have the best of the future after all."

"Something will have to be done to occupy their minds," Ed said. "I can't shake off the awful feeling I had when I saw Colne that he will spend the rest of his days in a bath chair. Then there's Pome-roy Fanton. I had a letter from his mother a week or so ago, and she says he will never be able to sit up. There was some chance for most men—given decent medical and surgical facilities—in the old wars, but now with big guns and high explosives if you're hit you might be blown to little pieces. There's not much soldiering in this warfare. The tools have outgrown the men. The laboratory has superseded strategy, and the aeroplane and the telephone have conquered old tactics and methods of assault. Machinery defies Mars. I can't see what there is in it to interest the real soldier. I was reading the other day of Spion Cop and Colenso, and really it was hard to believe those battles were fought about only fifteen years ago. The astounding advance in chemical and mechanical science may mean that no nation will dare think of going to war in a few years to come. One chap already predicts an invention so terrible that war will be impossible."

"I hope he will not sell the patent to dad," Evelyn said, "for he'd be pretty sure to buy it."

"That seems to be the only hope for humanity—that some inventor will come along with a weapon so terrible nations will have to disarm altogether," Ellen remarked. "Otherwise we shall have to go on inflicting woe and suffering until we breed a new race of men. I wonder though if women can't do something to put an end to all this slaughter. While I was in Wales I went with mother to see the hos-

pitals where she is helping. Bed after bed, ward after ward, young men, so terribly wounded few will ever do a day's productive labor. Then the place where the demented are housed! It made me think everything is against the chance of radical change in the male mind as things are. Society has a vocabulary set against it. The words—patriotism, nationalism, pro-this and anti-that, traitor, coward, shirker, loafer and so on, are so many effective missiles which make the present generation of males cringe. Now, if women could be taught by women to loathe and abominate all war it might be possible to make mothers teach their boys from the first that the command 'Thou shalt not kill,' must be obeyed. I think it rests with women in breeding a new race of men to teach that new race a culture which the men of this generation have neither the courage nor the wit to do."

"Ellen, my dear, you're an idealist," Lady Clungford said. "Before you get women to do what you want, you'll have to get them out of the habit of being sheep. Conjugal slaves are not fit for your job. Do you expect a lot of creatures who can only cackle about 'what my husband says,' 'what my husband thinks,' and 'what my husband does,' to raise your new race? Lord! I don't. Just think of the exceptions! Mighty few, eh? In a hunting county, of course, I must say, it's different, for a woman has to ride her own country and jump her own fences. She's a bit different. Mind, Ellen, I think you're on the right tack, but you must work a big change in your women first. What do you think, Ed?"

"We've all got to be changed," he said. "All of

us. The whole system of things is wrong. Education is rotten. We're not taught to think properly. I know I wasn't. It seems to me men must be taught to think of production, of conquering nature, of making life for the millions easier. The more I think of the activities and wonders of peaceful pursuit, the more paltry the conquest and glory of warfare become. Train all men's minds away from war, greed, envy and hatred. Give folks equal opportunities, a fair start, and don't let one section of society batten on another. Let there be no State plunder, no plundering taxes and duties—and there'll be no parasites. For parasites make wars. Men in the million want to be let alone. Mutual cooperation will do a lot to improve us if we can only get the basis of existence for all fixed justly. What we want now is some one to think of what our future is to be! Nobody seems to think of reconstruction in the old land. Will the future be merely a resumption of the past?"

"God forbid," Ellen interjected.

"You'll never see the past again," Lady Clungford exclaimed. "That's gone, Ed. The old past of mere pleasure for the few, and terrible toil for the mass is as dead as Queen Anne. The future will be for the workers and soldiers. I feel it in my bones. They've earned it, too, I've come to learn that much. But what on earth they will make of it I don't know."

Another week-end and Sir Alfred came again to Wilmslow; three visits in succession now. He had looked eagerly for Friday when he could escape from the dreary club and journey down to the country. The work in London had become so monotonous that

whole days passed away without an incident of interest. His business seemed to proceed without his aid. And he did not now mind the attitude of his daughters and the long arguments with Ed after dinner. Like political discussions with his Tory friends in the days gone by he took his son's arguments as a matter of course and forget them in his sleep. Nothing could change him for long, nothing impressed him deeply. He was impervious to serious change. His habit of thought was engrooved, and his ideas had rolled backward and forward along the same patch so long they had driven into a deep rut, there to stay. It had hurt him to overhear Ellen tell her child not to take his money, but he forgot it before he rose from breakfast. Nothing seemed to stick but munitions. He had even forgot his wife was a Roman, though she wrote regularly every week and told him what she was doing and what she was spending. Politically he was made much of by the Tories and conscriptionists, and he leaned now more and more toward that half of the Coalition Government.

He and Ed dined alone. The others had gone over to spend the evening with Lady Clungford. No discourtesy was meant for they had not expected him.

"Been down to see mother?" Ed asked.

"No, too busy, and she seems to get along all right."

"How are things going in town?"

"Fairly well. But it's winter—and nothing much is looked for on the front."

"What about this peace talk—"

"All bosh! Peace! Absurd!"

Ed got very little out of him at dinner, and when they went to the smoke room he dozed off in a big chair. He was asleep when Ed left to bring the ladies home. When they returned he had gone to bed.

"Make any impression on dad to-night?" Evelyn asked.

"No, he went to sleep after dinner. Seemed tired."

"Dear old Ed, you've undertaken a big task," Ellen observed, shaking her head gravely. "I think dad can go to sleep with his eyes open when we talk to him. He keeps his eyes open to make you think he's listening, but his mind is shut tight all the time. He'll never change. When he was here last Sunday I went down to your den to get a book. He was in a big chair before the fire—fast asleep—his eyes shut. He startled me—I didn't know he was in the room. There he sat, hunched up, breathing heavily, his face all of a frown—sinister, ruthless, cruel. He looked as if he suffered from a bad dream. I was fearfully fascinated by him as he sat there breathing heavily. Suddenly it flashed into my mind that he was Mammon, the Phœnician god of ill-gotten gains. No sooner the thought came into my mind than he woke with a hoarse growl."

They were silent for a while.

"Come—off to bed, all of you," Ed said. "Fine day to-morrow and plenty of work to do."

When Ed was alone with his wife he took her in his arms and asked:

"Do you mind dad coming here, old girl?"

"Not a bit." She kissed his head.

"Really?"

"Really, old boy, you stick to him."

"You haven't given him up?"

"No, if you haven't."

"I wonder if he is impossible after all."

Ed knew he had failed to make the slightest impression, and now he wondered if coming to Wilmslow would become a habit with his father and nothing good could result from it. He lay awake for an hour thinking of his father's life. He traced it all since he was a lad at Hampstead, the earliest he could remember, to the days before the war when the institute at Crowington village was opened. There was scarcely an event of any consequence worth remembering. It was just mere business, sheer sectarianism and steady prosperity.

Sir Alfred did not rise early enough to breakfast with the household at Wilmslow. And the fine day Ed predicted came mounting over Clungford Hill as the postman rattled up the gate of the Lodge. The room was full of the glow of the fresh sun when the maid brought the letters in. They were distributed round the table to Ellen, Evelyn and Clarice. Among the lot for Ed was a package from the front; it was addressed to him at Crowington Manor. He cut the strings and opened it. A letter lay on a piece of cloth. In a moment Ed felt it was something too gruesome for the others to see. He tried to hide it, but Clarice was up in a moment.

"What is it, Ed?" she asked.

"Never mind, old girl."

"About Billy."

He had not thought of him.

"Let me see, please."

"Well, there's a letter. Let me read it first."

"Aloud, Ed," Evelyn exclaimed.

He took it up and smoothed it out. A glance told him it was not about Billy.

"It's about Robert," he said.

"Read it, do," Ellen pleaded.

Ed ran his eyes over it and then read to them the following:

"Dear Birkett,

"I have not seen you since school. Perhaps you have forgot me. I was only a few yards away from Robert when he was blown to—nothing. A shell burst at his feet. I was wounded—not seriously—by some of the splinters. The cuff I enclose lay beside me when I got on my feet. It is the only piece of his uniform I could find. I have kept it for some time thinking you would like to have it. Forgive me if I have done wrong. Robert was a good friend to me and I mourn his loss more than I care to say.

"My deep condolences and sincere regards.

"Yours very truly,

"Charles Deys Halpin,

"Captain Lancers."

"Horrible!" Evelyn gasped, as she glanced at the ragged piece of sleeve lying on the white table-cloth.

"It reminds me of—oh, Ed!"

She sank down and wept bitterly.

"Who is Halpin?" Clarice asked, vexed at the effect of the letter on Evelyn.

"A man I knew at school."

"Rather thoughtless, wasn't it, to send that!"

"Yes—in a way," Ed said. "I suppose he didn't think." He turned to Evelyn and tried to comfort her. "I'm so sorry, Cricket, don't cry."

"Poor Bob," she sobbed. "Just like Herbert."

"It's awful, Ed," Ellen said, in a tone of exasperation. "It makes me positively wicked when I think of dad. You must show him that letter and the cuff. Perhaps it will bring his 'business' home to him. You must show him what it means, and do tell him to have the decency to keep away from us."

"I don't want to see him again," Evelyn cried.

Clarice was heartily sorry for her husband. He stood at the window looking disconsolate and gloomy.

"Ed, what can you do?" she inquired, putting her arm through his.

I don't know, old girl. It is difficult. I can't understand dad at all. Sometimes I think he doesn't care a fig for our feelings."

"I'm sure he doesn't," Ellen said. "Dad thinks we should have no feelings. According to his standard we are disloyal in not liking his business. He looks upon me as a traitor to home and sire. We are his children and we must harbor no views which run counter to his affairs. Our objections, our scruples, our conception of life, are not worth the consideration he gives to a request from one of his constituents. But I shall not submit to taking his notions of things because he happens to be my father. Anyway, the tyranny of parents must end. Parents who will live in the hoary discredited past must stand aside."

It was late when Sir Alfred came down to breakfast. Ed was out attending to some draining near the river; his sisters were in the nursery with the babies, and Clarice was with her dairyman. The dining-room was quiet and pleasant, the sunny room soothed Sir Alfred. The London papers had come

and lay on the table. When the maid brought his breakfast he was deep in an article on the financial situation. The writer of it suggested a forced loan. Between the kipper and the ham he tried to work out the total of the first peace budget if the war should end before the summer. He put down columns of figures without satisfactory result and then drew wiggly lines through the columns to obliterate them. His mood became fitful, and the quiet fretted him. He lit a cigar and tried walking around the table, wondering what was going on in town, how the Munitions Act was working, whether the Government would amend it. He went out into the hall and looked into the other rooms. The place seemed deserted. Where in the world were Ellen and Evelyn? He felt like shouting out for some one to come and talk to him.

When Ed returned he found his father in the study looking through the picture papers.

"That you, Ed?" he asked.

"Yes. Seen the girls?"

"No—no one. It's very quiet here. What you been doing?"

"Draining the marsh down by the river."

"You're always at it now," his father observed, casting a glance at Ed's big boots. "Feet wet?"

"No."

Ed charged his pipe and took a chair. He looked at his father and wondered how he should begin.

"Very comfortable this place, Ed."

"Yes, it's all right," he muttered.

"Any—news?"

Ed rose and gave him a sharp glance. He went

over to his desk and took Halpin's letter and the cuff from it.

"Read that," he said, as he placed the parcel on his father's knees.

Ed pulled hard at his pipe while his father unhooked his glasses and adjusted them. He turned the letter over, then looked at the cuff.

"What's this?"

"Read the letter."

When he had finished reading it, he glanced at the cuff again and handed the parcel back to Ed.

"Awful, isn't it?" he muttered. Then with a sigh, "Poor Bob!"

Some weeks were gone since he first heard of Robert's death. The news was stale.

"You read that—didn't you? Where Halpin says it was the only piece of Bob's uniform he could find?"

"Yes, I read it."

"That parcel came this morning—when we were at breakfast," Ed explained. "I opened it—never dreaming what was in it. Well—the girls saw it."

"Did they?"

"Yes. It upset them—Evelyn especially. I suppose it made her think of Herbert—"

"Herbert? Oh—yes, Herbert."

Ed felt sure his father's mind was far away.

"Dad, does it make you think?—this piece of stuff," and Ed placed the cuff in his father's hand.

"Think?"

"Yes, it's a cuff from Bob's uniform," Ed said, leaning nearer his father and looking at him sharply to fix his attention. "He was blown to pieces." Then

he added in a firm solemn tone: "Do you understand? Blown to pieces, dad—by a shell!"

His father straightened up slowly and looked nervously at Ed. There was something in his son's tone he had not heard before.

"I hope—hope you don't think—I'm—I'm indifferent to Robert's death," he stammered.

"No—no," Ed cried, and stamped his foot. "But are you indifferent to the way he met his death? Don't you feel it's horrible to make things which blow men—your own son—to pieces?"

"But, Ed—surely—you don't think I made the shell that—"

His son swept his hand swiftly in a gesture of disgust.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"I felt his death at the time as much as any of you did."

"Yes, yes, I believe you, dad. But that is not the point. You felt his death, but you go on making shells and coining money at it. It is detestable—loathsome! Now, if you can't give up your trade you must give up coming here—reminding us by your presence of all the things which have caused us so much suffering. The girls won't put up with you any longer. I'm very sorry—really. If it weren't for them I might stand it."

His father shrank into the chair, and his head dropped slowly down on his chest. Ed knew he suffered much more than his father did.

"You mean the girls don't want to see me?" he mumbled.

"I do. You ought to think of their feelings and

keep away. You know Clarice lost her brother a little while ago. Then Evelyn—well, her loss has never been appreciated by you—never. Herbert might have been a criminal for all you cared. Ellen! Well, as for Ellen, you seem to think she is a sentimental fool married to a crank. Now, your attitude is not fair. It denies our right to think for ourselves. Anyway, we're young—think what you like of our ideas—and we have our lives to live. You're old, dad. Very, very old—as old as war—and beyond change. It is your war, your old man's war, that has made us what we are, and we mean to try other methods—methods you dare not attempt."

"You are quite right, Ed," his father murmured. "Quite right. I don't blame you. Still it is a pity you can't see we have to live in a very practical world and that a man in my position—"

"Yes, yes—but don't let's go into that again."

Sir Alfred looked at his watch.

"There's a train at twelve forty-seven. I think I ought to go up to town just to see what they're doing. You might drive me over to Crowington if you have time."

"All right."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE motor struck the trap just behind the left wheel and the chestnut swerved, then stumbled on the cobble-stones in the gutter. It was done in a few seconds. Ed tried to save his father and at the same time hold the chestnut up when she swerved. For a moment he felt keenly the loss of his right hand.

Sir Alfred shot out of the trap, clear of the wheel and fell on his shoulder, so Babbicombe said. He saw it all, for he was dressing his shop window when he noticed Ed drive round the corner.

The yard of the Bear Inn was in an awkward place for traffic. Four roads met at that point; and though danger signals and warnings enough were shown, the gate of the inn yard was not easily seen. Harold swore he tooted his horn before he started out of the yard with the car. Whether he did so or not, there was no excuse for leaving the yard at such a pace; he was into the trap and smashed its wheel "in half a jiffy," Babbicombe said.

They raised Sir Alfred and carried him into the Bear. He was very badly shaken and scratched. Doctor Raymond put him to bed.

"How is he, Ed?" Harold asked.

"A bit knocked, but no bones broken," his brother replied. "Mighty narrow shave."

"Should I go up-stairs and see him?"

"I wouldn't. Leave him alone for a bit."

Sir Alfred saw Harold driving the car before it

struck the trap. "Harold, you fool," he shouted, and the next moment he shot out on to the street. Ed tried to excuse his brother's fault, but his father, who never lost consciousness, would not listen.

"Mad, Ed," he mumbled. "He's cracked. Never could—steer a car. No business—to—to—try. Oh, my head! Where is—Raymond? I know—I'm done for, you see."

They had given him brandy, and Ed had washed his face and hands. He was in great pain.

"Don't let him—up," he moaned. "Harold—a parson."

"Dad, would you like me to send for mother?"

"Eh? Mother, Ed?"

"Yes, would you?"

"No, don't. Not yet. She's got her hands full. No need to alarm her. Wait till—Raymond comes."

The doctor said there was no cause for anxiety. Sir Alfred was bruised and in pain, but rest and quiet would set him right in a few days.

He lay at the Bear for three weeks, then the doctor, who visited him every day, became so anxious that he sent to London for Sir Mortimer Grantley. The great specialist ordered Sir Alfred to be removed to Wilmslow.

"He's despondent—worrying about something," Sir Mortimer said to Ed. "He is out of pain, and there's not much physically the matter with him. Get him out of this place and make him cheerful."

At Wilmslow he was brighter. The girls put all their prejudices aside and tried to make him happy. Lady Horton-Birkett was sent for when Doctor Raymond decided to call Sir Mortimer from town. Ed

had been placed in a difficult position, not knowing what differences lay between his mother and father. Ellen was all for letting her mother know at once, but Ed decided to wait until his father asked to see her.

"I've wired for mother," Ellen said to Ed, the evening after Raymond told them he would call the specialist.

"I s'pose it's right, little 'un."

"Mother has to be considered, Roman or no Roman."

"But you know what he is."

"Yes, I know, Ed. Blame me."

They were surprised to find their mother and father friendlier than they had ever known them to be. She tended him, slept near him, read to him, indeed, she scarcely ever left him. Some miracle had taken place.

The day Leverton came to Wilmslow, Ellen thought her mother looked happier than ever before. There was much curiosity in their minds. Why the great solicitor should come down when their father was out of danger and speedily getting better and brighter they could not guess. Something about his will, Ed thought. At lunch their mother dropped no hint. Leverton and Sir Alfred lunched up-stairs.

Toward evening when Leverton had gone, Lady Horton-Birkett called them together, and said:

"Dad has given it up."

"Given what up?" Evelyn asked.

"The shell business."

"Good!" Ed cried.

"Yes, my boy, he has told Leverton to get rid of all his interests in munitions," she said. "He will

only keep the old business, Meek Brothers at Wapping."

"Mother, you are a wonder," Ellen exclaimed, and threw her arms around her neck.

"But how did you manage it?" Evelyn asked.

"Well, I think he had made up his mind to do it before I came back. He told me he had thought it over while he was lying at the Bear. He deserves all the credit—really. I didn't have to coax him at all."

The interview Ed had with his father later that evening was peculiar, inasmuch as Ed found no great satisfaction in what his father had done, and Sir Alfred seemed to be laboring under the delusion he had carried out his son's wishes.

"I'm out of it, rid of the whole business," Sir Alfred said, washing his hands with imaginary soap. "What a relief!"

"You're going to sell?"

"Everything. Leverton says it can be fixed up easily."

"And the money," Ed interjected. "What will you do with the money?"

"Lots of things. Give it away—mostly to my denomination. Good mind to build a really fine non-conformist chapel on the estate. Your mother and I will probably take a small place in North Wales. Confound these county folk here. It would serve them right if I did put a dissenting chapel—chapel? a cathedral—right under their noses. By George, I'll do it, Ed."

"So it will all go to chapels, eh?"

"Not all. A memorial hospital. I've been thinking about that. You put it into my head. Something on

a big scale—properly endowed. I've made a lot of suggestions to Leverton—oh, lots. After a bit I'll go up to town for a few days and begin something. Anyway, whatever I do with the money, I've got rid of the business. No more of that. And apart from sentiment, Ed, I think the time's ripe to get out. There'll be a crash one of these days. The conscriptionists are going a bit too far."

All were at the table the following Sunday but Fred and Harold. The latter had left Crowington for good. His father kept his word, and pensioned Harold off with one thousand pounds a year. Their last interview was a painful one; it was the only circumstance which marred the effect of Sir Alfred's withdrawal from business. Harold certainly was to blame for the heat and temper at that meeting. His father was inclined to be mild and generous, but the vicar was extremely bitter and said many unkind things. Their religious differences were wide and deep, so much so, that Harold woke in his sire all the burning zeal of his youth for disendowment and disestablishment.

Ben was down for the week-end, glad to get away from London for a few hours. The conversation at dinner was brighter than they had known it for a long time. They talked of the future, reconstruction, the Britain of the days to come.

"I have faith, Ben, in our people," Lady Horton-Birkett said. "The spiritual gain will help enormously. I see it everywhere. In the hospitals it is the most noticeable thing in the wounded. They have been changed."

"So I've heard," Ben observed. "Yet I see little spiritual change in the vast majority of the people. But there is a change I admit, too deep perhaps for expression just now. I don't refer to people who have always thought as we do." He looked at his wife, and gave her a significant nod. "The change in the majority of the people will be revealed when the war comes to an end. There must be time for reflection."

"Those who are shouting loudest just now to all the dogs of war may be the first to cry, 'No more war,' when the end comes," Ellen remarked.

"Oh, probably," Sir Alfred put in, with a peculiar shrug, as if the concession were made reluctantly.

"The return of the men from the front will act like leaven on the mass," Ben explained.

"That's it," Ed agreed. "You're right, Ben."

"Then the women," Evelyn exclaimed. "I look to the women to do a lot of good."

"Ben, are the women determined?" Ellen asked.

"Rather," he replied. "Don't worry about the women. They will be there, you see!"

"Good. I am glad to hear that," Lady Horton-Birkett muttered.

"But the soldiers—most of them young—will tell the true story of war when they know they are not merely home on furlough—that they are home for a season of peace. Then those who have not seen war will learn something about it from those who have really been in it."

"So you think the future is not so black as some of the papers paint it?" Sir Alfred inquired.

"The near future is pretty black," Ben mused. "The transition stage will be dark. But we shall come out of it all right."

"It will take a long time to get back to the position you were in in the spring of 1914," Ellen said. "You must restore freedom of speech and free the press. All the other old liberties of pre-war days must be reestablished. The mass will demand freedom of trade, and trade unionists will want their rules restored to them."

"Yet, though all these things be done," said Ben, "I don't see how any spiritual change in the majority of individuals is going to usher in the millennium. We're party politicians; our divisions are deep, fundamental. The war has made them deeper—any one with half an eye can see that."

"Right, Ben, right," Sir Alfred nodded. "There is no Liberal party now. Besides, you can't under this electoral system get a Liberal majority in the House unless the Whig, Liberal, Radical, Labor, Fabian, Socialist and Nationalist parties pull pretty well together."

"Most of them are now fighting among themselves," Ellen said. "When they're not fighting one another. Then they have no policy."

"No, the Tories have the policy," Ben asserted. "A very definite one. They know what they want and they stand together to get it. Protection and conscription. They're out for a full-blooded Prussian system. Still the women may upset their little game. Their demands may claim first attention after the war. The sex problem is here now to stay. My only fear is the women may be satisfied with little."

"They won't be such precious fools," Evelyn exclaimed.

"Well, there's something else, too," Ed said. "You've forgotten the sacrifice when you're thinking of spiritual gain, don't forget the sacrifice—that can't be ignored by any political party. An enlistment of six millions and a half. Six millions and a half volunteers. Volunteers, mind you. That was done before the Conscription Bill was passed. Think of the millions of men gone to fight other people's battles. There never was in the history of the world a sacrifice so disinterested so magnificently rendered. The British people—humbugged, misled, hoodwinked and maligned, have shown to the world that they, with all their faults, all the quarreling among themselves, have the biggest notion of what fighting for liberty means. Their sacrifice has been made, remember, without an enemy soldier setting foot on their soil. Their sacrifice in blood, tradition and gold must be recognized by their rulers—they daren't ignore it."

It was April when Sir Alfred went off to London with his wife. They lived quietly in a hotel in West Kensington. He went to the House for an hour or two every afternoon. Another political crisis was raging. But the old interest in party struggles was gone. Everything was changed: men, issues and parties. The plans of getting rid of his money occupied his attention, and he spent many hours with Leverton each day.

"Evie, dear, it's like another honeymoon, isn't it?" he said to his wife one night at dinner.

"You're happy now, Alfred?"

"Very."

"Have you settled anything with Leverton yet?"

"Nothing really settled, my love. In a day or two I'll get him to draw up another will, and then we'll go down to Colwyn."

The next day he stayed with Leverton at his office late. There had been a meeting of the heads of his denomination to discuss ways and means of disposing of that part of his money which the organization should enjoy. It was nearly ten when he reached the street. He had telephoned to his wife saying he would not be back for dinner.

He hailed a taxi, and stood on the curb humming an old Methodist hymn tune. Some lines of John Addington Symonds came into his mind. "These things shall be," etc. He gave an address in Wapping to the chauffeur, and was whirled away to the east. How strange, he thought, he should wish to go down and see the old place where he began his commercial career. He had not been there for many years. Meek Brothers, Chandlers? Since that firm was founded what changes had taken place. From wooden ships to iron, from iron to steel, from steel to steam, from steam to oil. Air-ships, wireless telegraphy, submarines and machine guns! Then the typewriter and the dictaphone! So some inventions of the century came to his mind.

The old office where he worked as a youth still stood in the yard, but another building erected nearly thirty years ago hid it from the road. How silent the place was. There seemed to be no one about. The night was so fine he could see the masts of ships

some distance off. He thought he would knock for the watchman and ask him to let him look over the place. A queer feeling of affection for the old place crept into his heart. He dismissed the taxi and rang the bell. He waited for some time and rang again. "He must be on his rounds," he muttered.

Waiting at the door of the new building he did not notice bright flashes of light searching the heavens. He heard an explosion which made his flesh creep. It seemed—a long—way—off. He looked up, and through the narrow slit of a street he saw the search-lights sweeping backward and forward above the roofs. He had never seen a Zeppelin. Instantly he was all curious, and rushed into the middle of the road to catch a glimpse of it.

The bomb that killed him dropped close at his feet. It made a huge hole in the street, and tore up the granite sets and paving stones as if they were pebbles. Sir Alfred was wiped out, and the wreckage of his building and the high wall on the other side of the street was strewn all about over a space of fifty yards or more.

Of him there was no remnant left.

THE END







**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

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